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Hanged Harpers and Incinerated Instruments:
Tudor Government Policies Toward Irish Poets in the Sixteenth Century

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in History from
The College of William and Mary

by

Jennifer Brooke Joyce

Accepted for _____
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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May 2, 2011

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Introduction

The *filid* of Ireland, also known as harpers, bards, and rhymers, are a mysterious group, who have gone relatively uncelebrated in history despite the large amount of influence they had in their own time. Their eventual downfall has generally been attributed to the dearth of patronage that resulted from the Flight of the Earls in 1602, though in fact they had been the targets of a gradually escalating English legal campaign for at least a half a century prior to that. The *filid* were a highly educated, highly influential presence in Irish culture. Their influence in nurturing Irish resistance to Anglicization and militant rebellion to English encroachment made them a threat to the New English regime, as did their effect on the loyalties of the Old English. As a result, the *filid* became targets of the English government, facing legal attacks that intensified as the century progressed.

The relationship between the *filid* and the English government was a crucial factor in the transformation of English policy in Ireland throughout the sixteenth century. It was at this point in history that the English government in Ireland abandoned their old program of gradual reform in favor of a harsher, more militaristic agenda that actively targeted Irish customs and traditions in an attempt to Anglicize the Irish by forcibly stamping out the native culture. To fully understand this fundamental transformation, it is crucial to understand who the *filid* were, what their place was in Irish society, and how the English perceived them. Because the shift in policy towards militarized Anglicization was a result of the dynamic between the *filid* and the English, it is crucial to comprehend what the Irish were thinking at the time, and to learn what thoughts and ideas they were supporting and disseminating through their poetry. The interaction between the *filid* and the English was a dialogue, and both sides must be examined in order to determine the ways in which each helped to structure their opponent's response.

Chapter 1: The English in Ireland

The Irish Problem, as it came to be known, was a thorn in the side of every Tudor monarch. This problem was the consequence of a long history of tense cultural interaction, beginning with the Norman invasions of the twelfth century under Richard de Clare, Earl of Pembroke, called Strongbow. King Henry II of England then journeyed to Ireland to strengthen and consolidate his claim, lest the Norman lords become too powerful. He appointed his son John Lord of Ireland, and when John ascended the throne, the Lordship of Ireland came directly under the crown's purview. By 1300 Norman control over Ireland was extensive, although native lords and kings still controlled large areas of the island.

Prior to English interference, Irish society was based around individual landholders, who were organized into family groupings. These families evolved into dynasties, creating a tradition of historical continuity and political entitlement that was later diagnosed by Sir Henry Sidney as one of the primary causes of political instability within Ireland.¹ Within the leading families rulership was hereditary, but inheritance was determined based on a custom known as *tanistry*, rather than the English custom of primogeniture. The new leader was chosen while the old one still ruled, elected by the men of the clan from a group called a *derbfine*, which consisted of eligible men of the family out to four generations. From this pool, it was possible to elect a capable leader instead of being forced to accept someone who was incompetent but possessed the correct pedigree. The custom of selecting a future leader before the position opened up greatly lessened any instability that might have been caused by the elective process.² Possibly as a result of this system which valued personal skills and character over bloodlines (to a certain extent),

¹ Brendan Bradshaw, "The Elizabethans and the Irish," review of *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: A Pattern Established 1565-1576* by Nicholas P. Canny, *An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 66 No.261 (Spring,1977), p.41.

² This custom was extremely offensive to the English government, mostly because it meant that property could not fall into the crown's hands through escheat if there were not a direct heir.

Gaelic culture revolved around the concept of personal honor. Honor served as a sort of social currency, and the protection of one's honor was of crucial importance. Understanding this cultural basis is imperative to comprehend the importance of the *filid* in Gaelic culture.

Over time some families became more powerful than others, and a system of clientage and patronage developed. While this arrangement bore a superficial resemblance to the feudal system of continental Europe, Irish society differed significantly in that the relationship between lord and client was contractual. It could be ended by either party at any time, and the lord had no estate or inheritance of the lands held by his clients. Small landholders would contract with an overlord, who held provincial authority over a relatively small area. These overlords owed duties and tribute in the form of coyne and livery to the lord of the *tuath*, the larger surrounding area. Coyne and livery referred to a system composed of many different longstanding Gaelic traditions wherein freeholders and lesser chiefs would provide their overlord with money, food, labor and/or military levies in exchange for protection. It was a foundation of the Irish polity, providing military and economic stability for the Irish lords, and English attempts to end the practice were seen as attacks against Irish culture.³ The power structure continued upward, the lord reigning supreme within the *tuath* but answering to an *ur-ri* or sub-king.⁴ Although many of the ancient Irish myths and legends made reference to a high king over all Ireland, as did contemporary bardic poetry,⁵ by the sixteenth century it was more literary affectation than actual fact, as there had been no high king since Ruairi O Conchubhair in 1186.⁶

The Normans tried to impose their own culture and customs upon the Irish, but by the end of the fourteenth century, Norman control had weakened considerably. The immigrant

³ Colm Lennon, *Sixteenth Century Ireland: the Incomplete Conquest*, (Gill & MacMillan, 1994), 54.

⁴ G.A. Hayes-McCoy, "Gaelic Society in Ireland in the late Sixteenth Century", *Historical Studies*, No. 4 (1964) 48-53.

⁵ Richard A. McCabe, *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment: Elizabethan Ireland and the Poetics of Difference*, (Oxford University Press, 2002), 37.

⁶ Edmund Curtis, *A History of Ireland from Earliest Times to 1922*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 51.

nobles had melded back into the native population, becoming “more Irish than the Irish,” as Frances Plowden phrased it in 1803.⁷ Laws were passed by the English government attempting to check this indigenization. The Statutes of Kilkenny, passed in 1367, banned the Irish language, Irish manners of dress, and other traditional customs within English-controlled areas.⁸ The majority of these laws applied only to English subjects—their purpose was to protect English culture among the colonists, not to convert the natives. The Statutes also formally recognized the existence of the English Pale, the area surrounding Dublin,⁹ and included severe regulations of “Irish hangers on”—a category which included pipers, babblers, storytellers, rhymers, gamblers, and other idle¹⁰ men.¹¹ The Statutes ostensibly applied to the whole of Ireland, but because they addressed the indigenization of the English, they actually only applied to those parts of the island inhabited by the English colonists.¹² By the end of the fourteenth century it was only within the Pale that English laws and customs still held sway. This area was to serve as the English stronghold in Ireland for the next two hundred years.

The indigenization of Old English, as old Norman families such as the Butlers and Fitzgeralds were called, was a frequent complaint in Elizabethan writings, a dilemma that was aided and abetted by the *filid*. Nicholas Dawtrey accused the Burkes of Mayo of becoming “as Irish as any of the rest, and as rebellious.”¹³ While the acculturation of the invaders had been a concern since the Statutes of Kilkenny were published to prevent it in 1367, it became increasingly more important with the new wave of Englishmen coming to colonize Ireland in the

⁷ Robin Frame “‘More Irish than the Irish themselves’” *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*. S. J. Connolly. Oxford University Press, 2007. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. [College of William and Mary](http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t245.e1274). 2 May 2011 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t245.e1274>>

⁸ le the Pale, Co. Leinster, and Co. Munster

⁹ The counties of Dublin, Louth, Meath and Kildare

¹⁰ From the English viewpoint

¹¹ Richard Bagwell, *Ireland Under the Tudors* (London: Holland Press, 1963), 32.

¹² Steven G. Ellis, *Ireland in the Age of the Tudors, 1447-1603*, (London: Longman, 1998), 23.

¹³ Morgan, 88.

mid-sixteenth century. The Anglo-Irish, or ‘Old English,’ as the families that had arrived in the Norman invasion of the twelfth century came to be called, were unreliable as English allies. Many of them had married into the leading Irish families since their arrival, adopting many of the customs and cultural traits of the natives including language, manner of dress, and brehon law. These nominally English dynasties had become accustomed to Irish culture, and to the elevated place they held within it. When the ‘New English’ began arriving en masse during the Tudor era, the Anglo-Irish were less than thrilled to find their powers and privileges limited by a distant monarch. The new plan of dismantling brehon law and Irish customs was unwelcome to a group of people who had learned to prosper and take advantage of those same customs.

The Butlers and Fitzgeralds played an important role in Irish history, forming two opposing factions whose conflicts were central to Irish politics before and during the Elizabethan conquest. The Earl of Ormond headed the Butler faction, while the Earls of Desmond and Kildare were prominent Fitzgeralds.¹⁴ The rivalry between the two clans was particularly violent during the fifteenth century, when the Lancasters began selecting their governors from the Irish nobility, particularly the Butlers. The Fitzgeralds supported the Yorkists, whose victories during the middle years of the War of the Roses left the Fitzgeralds in control of the governorship.¹⁵ The Lancasters were the ultimate victors, and with the ascension of Henry Tudor came further tension, particularly in 1487 when the Earl of Kildare led the Fitzgeralds in an attempt to crown the pretender to the throne, Lambert Simnel.¹⁶ The rebellion failed, and by 1503 Kildare had worked himself back into the king’s good graces as a useful representative of the crown maintaining order in Ireland. In the meantime, however, the Butlers had gained power that they were loath to give up. The Butler-Fitzgerald feud continued to flare up at different points

¹⁴ Ellis, 28.

¹⁵ Ellis, 58.

¹⁶ Ellis, 84.

throughout the sixteenth century, complicating English politics through their own identities and importance in the Irish polity—the Fitzgeralds became the epitome of the Anglo-Irish, Catholic and thoroughly Gaelicized in comparison to the protestant, relatively loyal, Butlers.¹⁷

The significance of these families and their importance within the Irish polity was reconfigured by the unique structure of Elizabethan government. The government of Tudor England was inherently different from a centralized, bureaucratic government today. A personal monarchy, the government revolved around a near all-powerful monarch who bestowed and took away power at will. The representatives of the Tudor Government all depended on royal favor for their posts and could be removed at any time if the monarch turned against them. Consequently, government institutions were prone to upheaval as the factions at court gained or lost royal favor. This system ensured the continuing importance of the ruling families of Ireland, while at the same time weakening their positions, leaving them dependent on the whims of their monarch just like the English courtiers. Crown and council were occupied with looming foreign threats, pressing economic issues and religious turmoil—problems more pressing and much closer to home than those of Ireland, and at the best of times they were poorly informed as to the true state of things on the western isle as a result of the great distance and unreliable communication. To simplify their work, they selected personnel, rather than policy.¹⁸ Once the monarch had chosen a representative, it was that agent's responsibility to devise and enact policy. These representatives relied heavily on the aforementioned ruling families of Ireland, parleying with them and granting certain privileges in exchange for military and political support.

¹⁷ Nicholas Canny, *Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland*, (Dublin, 1976), 143.

¹⁸ Ciaran Brady, *The Chief Governors: The rise and fall of reform government in Tudor Ireland 1536-1588*, (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 165.

Because of the personal nature of English government, government policies had a tendency to change with each new Lord Viceroy in Ireland. The position of viceroy, also known as Lord Deputy or Lord Lieutenant, was a position of great responsibility, serving as the monarch's deputy and head of the executive government in Ireland. There was a great deal of turnover, particularly as Ireland gained prominence in the eyes of the Tudor monarchs. Prior to the reign of the Tudors, Ireland had been ignored for the most part since the late fourteenth century, preempted by more immediate concerns like the 100 Years War and the War of the Roses. Once the Tudor dynasty was established, and even after the Simnel revolt, little was done to address the disintegrating English hold on Ireland until the reign of Henry VIII. Henry began to take a more active role in Irish governance prior to the Reformation, his attention drawn to the island by a 1519 eruption of the Butler-Fitzgerald feud in the form of rival claimants to the Earldom of Ormond. The following year Kildare was called to London to discuss his administration, likely to explain his failure to prevent negotiations between the Earl of Desmond and foreign powers. He was forced to resign his office and in his place was sent Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, the first of many non-Geraldine royal governors.¹⁹ This was the beginning of Henry's rising level of interest in Ireland, as England became increasingly estranged from the rest of the European countries, and the unstable, quasi-autonomous conditions of Ireland's government made it very attractive to the other European monarchs as a point of interference into English affairs.²⁰

Drawing the attention of foreign powers was the most important immediate effect of the Henrician Reformation. Within the country itself it caused relatively little upset, due in part to the desperate need for reform within the Irish Church at the time. The medieval Irish church

¹⁹ Lennon, 84.

²⁰ Brady, 5.

suffered from extreme poverty, as well as rampant discrimination, disunity and corruption. Orders of celibacy were all but ignored, and in fact many benefices wound up being passed down from father to son. Because of this poor state of affairs, the Irish church was highly susceptible to state-sponsored reform in the early sixteenth century.²¹ Henry's essentially Catholic doctrine and the strong sense of continuity maintained by his Reformation program meant that it met with relatively little active opposition from his Irish subjects. Additionally, the lack of funding within the Irish Church made positions in Ireland unattractive to English preachers, forcing Henry to rely primarily on local individuals.²² This shortage of suitable preachers and dependence on existing individuals and institutions meant that reform and religious upheaval was at a minimum during Henry's reign. However, the Catholic kingdoms of Italy, Spain and Scotland saw the Reformation as an opportunity for interference with England, a concern that would occupy English minds for some time to come.²³

Henry VIII and his chief advisor Thomas Cromwell espoused a plan of gradual reform that was intended to further English law in Ireland by enlisting both the Fitzgeralds and the Butlers as government representatives. However, they recognized the dangers of allowing these Irish magnates to seize control, and so they were to act under the supervision of an English governor.²⁴ In this way Cromwell hoped to take advantage of the networks of patronage and obligation already in place, gradually convincing the Anglo-Irish and the Gaels alike of the benefits of cooperation with the English government. The foundations of this plan were sound, and it had every likelihood of success until the Geraldines, led by 'Silken Thomas' Earl of Kildare rebelled against the perceived encroachment against their powers in 1534. The

²¹ Ellis, 204.

²² Ellis, 210.

²³ E.M. Hinton, *Ireland Through Tudor Eyes*, (Philadelphia, 1935), 12.

²⁴ Brady, 7.

successful defeat of the rebellion cost about £40,000, not only forcing the English to maintain a much larger standing army than usual against the threat of further insurrection, but also eliminating the possibility of the Fitzgeralds' direct participation in the newly instigated reform policy.

The first Royal Governor of Ireland, following the Kildare rebellion, was Leonard Grey. He was sent to Ireland in 1535 as marshall of the English army having previously served against both the French and the Scots. His sister was the wife of the 9th Earl of Kildare, and her stepson was Thomas Fitzgerald, leader of the Kildare rebellion. Grey was appointed lord deputy immediately upon the death of the previous governor, Lord Skeffington.²⁵ Grey was faced with the difficult task of managing the extremely factionalized Irish while at the same time appearing to be above the fray and avoiding accusations of favoritism—something made even more difficult for him by his close family ties to the Fitzgeralds. It was necessary to assume a strong, independent stance in order to impress the Irish lords and combat any accusations of nepotism, but he also had to avoid leaning too strongly in the direction of the Butlers, lest he appear to be a pawn of the House of Ormond.²⁶ The Butler-Fitzgerald feud was an issue that faced every subsequent Viceroy and contributed to many of their downfalls. Grey supported the Geraldines, who were still recovering from their failed rebellion and needed a protector. This decision seemed an expedient way to gain a network of support, given the massive task Grey faced—he was expected to cut costs and maintain order while at the same time cutting costs and reducing the size of the garrison.²⁷ Without the assistance of the Geraldine network of connections across Ireland, this would have been impossible. In point of fact, Grey proved to be active and effective,

²⁵ Mary Ann Lyons, 'Grey, Leonard , Viscount Graney (c.1490–1541)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11551>, accessed 24 March 2011]

²⁶ Brady, 17.

²⁷ Brady, 19.

despite dwindling credibility due to his failure to prevent the execution of his step-nephew Thomas Fitzgerald and the other leaders of the Kildare uprising.²⁸ He inspired respect for the crown and bonds of good behavior from many Irish lords through numerous progresses across the island.

However, there was still resistance to foreign rule among the Irish lords who didn't want to give up their power, culture, and, in many cases, religion. In 1538 a band of the lords and secondary chiefs of Northern Ireland formed what was called the Geraldine League, a group that was primarily a Gaelic movement, although their eventual goals included the reinstatement of the young Earl of Kildare and Grey's recall.²⁹ They invaded the Pale in 1539, and while Grey successfully routed them, the League continued to cause problems, weakening Grey's reputation and necessitating ever increasing numbers of English soldiers in Ireland.³⁰ In general Grey attempted to fit English reform policy into the existing Irish polity, attempting to keep a delicate balance between both Irish and English factions. He was fairly successful at maintaining order and gradually introducing aspects of Reformation, but in the end fell victim to an opposing faction in England.

In 1541 Grey was recalled to London and received well at court. However, shortly after his arrival his patron Thomas Cromwell was charged with treason, and within two days Grey was also in prison facing charges of treason. These charges included private dealings with the Geraldines, inciting insurrection among his Gaelic subjects, and abusing his authority.³¹ He was found guilty and executed, and in his place was sent Sir Anthony St Leger, who was to become a

²⁸ Lennon, 150.

²⁹ Hiram Morgan, "Geraldine League", *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*. S. J. Connolly. Oxford University Press, 2007. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. [College of William and Mary](http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t245.e774). 2 May 2011 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t245.e774>>

³⁰ Ellis, 148.

³¹ 'Grey, Leonard , Viscount Graney (c.1490–1541)'

recurring figure in Ireland's history over the next half century.³² St. Leger was a member of the Duke of Norfolk's faction and had contributed to the downfall of Leonard Grey.³³ He advocated a policy of reform through peaceful persuasion, centered on the 1541 act of the Dublin Parliament which created Henry VIII as King of Ireland, rather than Lord as he had previously been known. This was in part a reaction to the Kildare Rebellion of 1534, and in part a continuation of the Supremacy Act passed by the Irish Parliament as part of the Henrician Reformation. The creation of a kingdom of Ireland also made it possible to establish a personal relationship between the English throne and the Irish nobility—catering to Irish lords' sense of self-importance and countering hundreds of years of governmental neglect.

While similar to Grey's program in many respects, St. Leger's differed in several important ways. One was the deeper understanding of the complexities of the Gaelic polity. He pursued a policy of conciliation with bards and rhymers, people whom he recognized as being influential within Irish culture. He was purposefully vague when referencing the extent of a lord's power in a given locale, lest he grant more authority than a lord could realistically lay claim to. Freeholders were acknowledged as independent subjects, but no immediate attempt was made to determine their feudal rights—this was to be established at a later point in the reform process, and the government declared itself willing to let the clansmen themselves determine particularly difficult issues. Concessions were also made regarding succession, and despite the English custom of primogeniture, agreements were made with individual clans formally recognizing the institution of *tanaiste* among them. The O'Briens, the O'Tooles, the Kavanaghs,

³² Brady, 24.

³³ Alan Bryson, 'St Leger, Sir Anthony (1496?–1559)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24512>, accessed 24 March 2011]

and the O'Neills, for example, were all exempt from determining the chieftaincy by primogeniture by special agreement.³⁴

The other difference between St. Leger's program and Grey's was that the aforementioned agreements were not made between the Irish lords and the Viceroy; they were made between the lords and the newly crowned King of Ireland. St. Leger hoped to create an alternative to the Butler or Geraldine factions in a king's party, which promised more and more permanent benefits than previous relationships with the English government.³⁵ There were detractors to St. Leger's regime, primarily the Butlers and other Tudor politicians who opposed his patron the Duke of Norfolk and wished to weaken that faction's power. These statesmen brought several charges against St. Leger at different points, including mismanagement of funds and abuse of power.³⁶ There were several investigations into these allegations, but they came to naught. St. Leger remained in office, and his program was in fact fairly successful. It rested on an elevated understanding of the position of viceroy as the king's proxy in Ireland. In 1548 St. Leger was recalled to England, but his influence over Irish policy continued, and he served two more terms as viceroy before his death in 1559.³⁷ St. Leger espoused a program that attempted to operate within established Irish politics, offering a king's party as an alternative to the Butlers or the Fitzgeralds. This plan proved effective, but cost prohibitive.

The lofty status of the viceroy as the crown's representative in Ireland deteriorated rapidly after Henry's death in 1547 as his heirs attempted to consolidate their own power. The reigns of Edward VI and Mary Tudor marked a change in approaches, from slow, persuasive

³⁴ Brady, 27.

³⁵ Brady, 30.

³⁶ Brady, 38.

³⁷ Alan Bryson, 'St Leger, Sir Anthony (1496?–1559)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.wm.edu/view/article/24512>, accessed 10 March 2011]

reform to the establishment of plantations and a strong, military government on the island. There had always been a faction at court that espoused this approach, but until the death of Henry VIII those in favor of gradual reform had retained control. This change was primarily due to the increased religious turmoil that accompanied Edward and Mary's reigns. Edward imposed numerous reforms of the Irish church, destroying the sense of continuity that his father had maintained. The lack of preachers in Ireland limited the ability of the Edwardian regime to persuade the Irish of the legitimacy of their changes, and while the royal governors of the period did obtain acknowledgment of royal supremacy from many Irish lords, they withheld support of the religious reforms.³⁸ Mary restored traditional rites and practices when she ascended the throne in 1553, as well as restoring the crown's relationship with Rome. This re-establishment reassured the majority of Irish people to a certain extent, but left Irish Protestants in fear.

By this point in English history the use of force in the re-conquest of Ireland had become standard policy.³⁹ This new approach was enacted by a series of new governors: Sir Edward Bellingham, an experienced military man who served from May 1548 to December 1549⁴⁰, Sir James Crofts (May 1551-Nov. 1552); and Thomas Radcliffe, Earl of Sussex, app. March 1556. The gaps were filled in by St. Leger himself, who was recalled multiple times throughout the 1540s and 1550s before ultimately being replaced by Sussex. Bellingham and Crofts continued many aspects of St. Leger's policy, including surrender and regrant and the energetic arbitration of disputes between Irish clans.⁴¹ The difference was that during the mid-Tudor era these judicious reforms were supplemented by conspicuous military force and coercion. During this time England was facing a number of crises, including the uncertainty of the succession, a severe

³⁸ Ellis, 222.

³⁹ Ellis, 224.

⁴⁰ Lennon, 165.

⁴¹ Brady, 49.

shortage of funds, and increasing tensions with France. This last problem was especially alarming, considering the increased immigration of Scots to the north-east coast of Ireland, and the fact that several Geraldine exiles had taken refuge in France and were attempting to convince Henry II to invade Ireland.⁴² These problems, combined with the rampant party politics and religious upheaval of Edward and Mary's reigns, resulted in an increased militarization of the English government in Ireland, as well as a re-definition and decline of the position of viceroy.

Sussex was appointed viceroy in 1556, replacing St. Leger, who was investigated and accused of corrupt dealings by Sir William FitzWilliam. FitzWilliam was appointed deputy chancellor and sent by Elizabeth as commissioner to investigate the charges against the governor. After he presented his findings St. Leger was dismissed, and Sussex, FitzWilliam's kinsman, was appointed in his place. This appointment was to prove highly beneficial to FitzWilliam's career.⁴³ Sussex was unusual among the viceroys, having actively sought out the job—nearly all of the previous governors had been recalled in disgrace, and many of them had been financially ruined due to the crown's reluctance to provide funding for the Dublin government and their dependents. Sussex's motives stem from the optimistic mindset of the Marian courtiers in the mid-1550s. The preceding administrations were perceived as incompetent and corrupt—the nobles back in England had the optimistic impression that with a bit more effort and integrity the military and political problems of Ireland would solve themselves, leaving Ireland needing only routine administration. They agreed that a number of problems needed to be addressed, but viewed them as not insurmountable, and saw in them a great opportunity for glory and

⁴² Brady, 58.

⁴³ Mary Ann Lyons, 'Fitzwilliam, Sir William (1526–1599)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9664>, accessed 25 March 2011]

advancement to whoever was willing to step up and accept the challenge.⁴⁴ This is the Ireland that Sussex thought he encountered when he was appointed viceroy.

Elizabeth kept Sussex as viceroy when she ascended the throne in 1558, providing a thread of continuity amidst the regime change. On paper, Sussex's approach was relatively consistent with previous programs, mixing gradual reform with occasional military displays of power. By 1560 he had formed a plan for reform targeting the institution of Irish factions. Sussex hoped that if the English government could offer sufficient incentives, those clans currently supporting the two major Irish families would desert in favor of titles and privileges from the English crown, and the major factions would simply wither away from lack of support.⁴⁵ Essentially Sussex's plan for de-Gaelicizing the Irish and Anglo-Irish was a long-term highly flexible program based on the "king's faction" concept initially proposed by Cromwell, working gradually to avoid violent resistance. Legal codes were to consist of a blend of brehon and English common law, and lesser offences were to be tried and punished according to Gaelic custom. In this way he hoped to inch the Irish into Anglicization with a minimum of conflict.⁴⁶

The Lord Viceroy's grand strategy shared many similarities with that prevalent during Henry's reign, but the way in which he approached it was new. He submitted a series of treatises to the Privy Council requesting funds and other support, each stressing one specific problem, along with one solution that would solve the problem and allow the reform of Ireland to continue unimpeded. Unaddressed, he claimed, this same problem would be solely responsible for the complete and total downfall of the English government in Ireland. These treatises also included timelines and projected cost. This organization of the problems of Ireland into ranking order was a new concept, and each problem became "a test case of the crown's determination to fulfill the

⁴⁴ Brady, 70.

⁴⁵ Brady, 72.

⁴⁶ Brady, 74.

long-term aims implicit in the kingship act of 1541.”⁴⁷ Sussex had no intention of staying in Ireland for a prolonged period of time—his program operated on the assumption that he would take over, fix the primary problems and establish the means to finally conclude the conquest and reformation of Ireland, lay the foundations, then leave and allow his successors to deal with any resultant issues. This mindset, accompanied by his case-by-case approach, greatly simplified his administration.⁴⁸

This focused, short-term perspective also had unexpected consequences regarding public support, or the lack thereof. Financially, the English government in Ireland had always been in poor condition. Many of the previous Governors had gone bankrupt from paying the crown’s debts out of their own pockets. Sussex chose a different option, taking advantage of a traditional right of the governor known as ‘cess.’ Although it had been traditionally recognized that the country should help to subsidize the victualling and lodging of the governor’s troops, the governor had also been expected to buy goods at market value when possible, and to make good any losses that the country suffered through purveyance. Cess was seen as an occasional expedient, not something that was regularly put into use. Sussex made cess an integral part of his administration, commandeering over 41,500 pecks of grain between 1556 and 1563, and forcing his ever-expanding garrisons on the people to board and lodge.⁴⁹ The results were starvation, unrest, and a rise in general ill-will amongst the populace, as well as opposition among the nobility and other members of the Elizabethan regime. Edward Walshe, a scholar who supported the gradual reform school of thought, wrote that “the soldiers have done more harm to the

⁴⁷ Brady, 79.

⁴⁸ Brady, 81.

⁴⁹ Calculated from John Chaloner’s collection of data from the council books relating to cess, NAI, MS 2735, cited in Ciaran Brady’s *The Chief Governors*, 88.

country than ever the Irish did.”⁵⁰ In spite of subsidizing his funds through cess, Sussex’s government still spent a great deal more than the crown and the Privy Council was comfortable with, for this rise in violence and unrest was accompanied by multiple failed attempts to establish plantations in Laois-Offaly and Ulster, a method of colonization that had been initiated under Queen Mary.⁵¹

Additionally, Sussex consistently failed to capture Shane O’Neill, an Irish lord whose brother had been recognized as leader of the clan by the English government, prompting him to rebel.⁵² These failures were costly and embarrassing to the crown. From 1560-1563 Sussex made war on O’Neill and suffered a series of embarrassing and costly losses.⁵³ He was recalled in 1564 through the machinations of Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, a leading power at court who was interested in using Ireland as a stepping stone in his further rise to power. When a chastened but not completely discredited Sussex returned to England, he had transformed the Irish question into a national issue rather than a question of local governance. This transformation was a result of his internationally known failures regarding O’Neill, the frequent presence of Ireland in the Council’s thoughts that resulted from his one-problem-at-a-time approach, and the wide-ranging criticism of his abuse of cess.⁵⁴

Sir Henry Sidney was appointed Lord Governor after the recall of Sussex. Appointed by his patron Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, he essentially embarked on exactly the same program as Sussex had, while promising greater efficiency and significantly lower costs to the crown.⁵⁵ Despite this, he received limited support from the Queen and council, except in the case

⁵⁰ Walsh to Cecil, 23 Aug. 1559, in Brady’s *The Chief Governors*, 89.

⁵¹ Brady, 96.

⁵² Canny, *Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland*, 34.

⁵³ Brady, 101.

⁵⁴ Brady, 107.

⁵⁵ Brady, 119.

of Shane O'Neill, who had become an international embarrassment for the English government. Despite costs high above his original estimate, these august bodies willingly supplied more money, troops, and munitions in the quest to defeat the man who had made them a laughingstock among foreign powers. In all other aspects of governance, however, Sidney's opportunity for action was limited, and the large amount of money laid out meant that the Queen and her council watched him very closely to reassure themselves that it was not being squandered. His recommendations for both government and church positions were ignored, and Elizabeth informed him that were the Butlers (who supported Sussex) neglected in favor of the Geraldines, she would personally interfere.⁵⁶ Unable to resist such a powerful foe, Sidney was forced to hold his hand and accept Elizabeth's micromanagement, deferring action on some of her directives and biding his time, hoping that eventually his successes elsewhere would buy her trust and allow him more of a free hand regarding Munster and the Geraldine/Butler conflict. It was during this period that Sidney passed a law stating that any harper could be attacked with impunity, perhaps in an effort to curry favor in England and reassure any critics that he was not being too easy on the Irish.⁵⁷ It is also possible that this law was part of the effort to catch Shane O'Neill, being passed in 1566, the same year Sussex opened his campaign against him.

Fortunately for Sidney, he still held the office of lord governor when Shane O'Neill was assassinated by the MacDonalds⁵⁸ while in the midst of secret negotiations in early June of 1567.⁵⁹ The death of Shane O'Neill had a tremendous impact on the Irish government, restoring Sidney's personal prestige and countering the perceived weakness of the regime indicated by the

⁵⁶ Brady, 122.

⁵⁷ Quinn, 126.

⁵⁸ Shane had waged war against the Scottish MacDonalds in his attempt to gain supreme authority in Ulster

⁵⁹ Christopher Maginn, 'O'Neill, Shane (c.1530–1567)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20785>, accessed 13 April 2011].

long-term failure to subdue him.⁶⁰ However, the glow quickly wore off, and Sidney's involvement with the Geraldine faction came back to haunt him. Between 1568-1571 Sidney was forced to deal not only with increased factional turmoil, but with increased financial and political restrictions from London. Elizabeth commanded a meeting of the Irish Parliament in 1568, the first since 1560, in an attempt to pass a new legislative program that would further Anglicization and extend royal authority, primarily by outlawing 'coyne and livery' and attainting, or laying claim to the lands of the late Shane O'Neill, which would give the crown control of a large portion of Ulster.⁶¹ Nearly every bill was hotly contested, and the one session turned into eight, at the end of which barely half of the bills offered had been passed.

As the new legislative programs Elizabeth had attempted to push through failed, she seemed to lose interest, becoming distracted by Mary, Queen of Scots and her plots against Elizabeth. In 1570 Elizabeth was excommunicated by Pope Pius V, further complicating England's relationship with the rest of Europe and the way in which the English government dealt with its Catholic subjects. Ireland was once again put on the back burner, despite the turmoil of the Desmond rebellion, in which the Irish were assisted by Spanish and papal soldiers. Sidney's attempts to establish presidencies in Munster and Ulster, the two most turbulent areas of the Ireland, were ignored.⁶² When Sidney was recalled in 1571, he returned disillusioned and begged his patron Leicester to refrain from ever returning him to Ireland.⁶³

In spite of this, Sidney returned to Ireland as viceroy in 1575, following a four-year interim during which the post was held by Sir William Fitzwilliam. In fact, Sidney actively

⁶⁰ Although he could take no personal credit, he argued that his own actions had led O'Neill to seek the help of the Scots, thus bringing about his end.

⁶¹ Wallace T. MacCaffrey, 'Sidney, Sir Henry (1529–1586)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.wm.edu/view/article/25520>, accessed 10 March 2011]

⁶² Brady, 133.

⁶³ Brady, 136.

campaigned for the position once again, proposing a new plan in which the presidents would give up their right to cess in return for a fixed yearly payment from the chiefs, who in turn would give up their rights to coyne and livery for fixed payments. In this way, coin and livery would be abolished and the English concept of rent-paying tenants would come into being. Sidney promised that his plan would render the Irish government self-sufficient in three short years, at a cost of £60,000. Unfortunately for Sidney, neither the palesmen nor the Irish chiefs approved of this plan, and both groups sent emissaries to London to complain to the queen. With these complaints already weakening royal confidence, Sidney also overran his cost estimates significantly, resulting in his final recall in 1578 and the end of his Irish career.⁶⁴

Following Sidney's tenure there were no significant innovations or changes in government policy in Dublin for several years after his recall, and the next Lord Lieutenant of note was Sir John Perrot, who served from 1584 to 1588. He had previously served as president of Munster immediately following the Desmond rebellion of 1569. By all accounts his presidency was violent, and he executed over 800 rebels in the two years he served as president. As viceroy he enthusiastically resumed the new policy of militaristic Anglicization, and his term as viceroy was essentially a political failure, but a military success. Perrot made several unsuccessful attempts at reform and Anglicization, banning various aspects of Gaelic culture including bardic poetry. However, he managed to put down the rebels and largely pacify the island. He returned to England in 1588 in ill-health and quarrelling with his presidents and other important officials in the Irish government, but with his reputation largely intact, something that was both unusual for the Lord Deputy of Ireland and crucial to any future success in English politics.

⁶⁴ 'Sidney, Sir Henry (1529-1586)'

Perrot's successor, Sir William FitzWilliam, had served as Lord Lieutenant before, during the interim between Sir Henry Sidney's two terms as governor. Despite this previous experience, many Elizabethans apparently went over his head to get Perrot's opinion about Irish affairs. For example, in 1590 the Earl of Thomond complained that a Captain Woodhouse had arrested three harpers to whom Thomond had extended his protection. Perrot intervened, declaring that Woodhouse couldn't judge whether or not they were guilty since he couldn't speak Irish, and Woodhouse was subsequently jailed.⁶⁵ This incident is peculiar to say the least, and likely had more to do with factional politics and power plays than it did with any anti-harper agenda. The Earl of Thomond had extended his protection to the three men—Captain Woodhouse's subsequent arrests were therefore a challenge to his authority. Perrot's intercession on behalf of Thomond demonstrates his continued involvement in Irish politics. Understandably, FitzWilliam came to resent this, and by 1589 the two men were exchanging open insults. The smear campaign initiated by FitzWilliam and his patron Lord Burghley peaked upon the death of Perrot's patron Lord Walsingham in May of 1590, and in December of the same year Perrot was formally charged with treason, accused of conspiring with known Irish traitors as well as the Irish king, and removed to the Tower to await his trial.⁶⁶ Among the number of charges levied against him was the accusation that he had been too lenient with the Irish harpers.⁶⁷ While this might be understandable considering the incident involving Thomond and Woodhouse, the aforementioned Ordinances he passed against the harpers and rhymers while president of Munster makes this allegation suspect—unsurprising considering the identity of his accusers. Perrot was found guilty in 1592 and executed that same year.

⁶⁵ Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British, 1580-1650*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 94.

⁶⁶ Roger Turvey, 'Perrot, Sir John (1528–1592)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2009 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.wm.edu/view/article/21986>, accessed 10 March 2011]

⁶⁷ W.H.G. Flood, *History of Irish Music*, (1905), 123.

Fitzwilliam's tenure as Lord Deputy lasted from 1588 until poor health led him to ask to be recalled in 1594. His main goal during that time was to cut public expenditure and improve the Irish government's financial standing.⁶⁸ He was fairly unsuccessful, due to his expensive military expeditions, first in pursuit of shipwrecked Spaniards from the Armada that crashed off the west coast in 1588. Having sent soldiers to locate and execute any Spanish sailors found in their regions, Fitzwilliam then marched north to punish the Spaniards and their Irish allies. He mounted several other military expeditions in the next few years against Irish lords who flouted the Queen's law. Fitzwilliam was simultaneously campaigning against his rival Sir John Perrot, as was previously mentioned. He was also at odds with Sir Richard Bingham, president of Connaught. By 1594, Fitzwilliam was in poor health and without the resources he required to do his job. He petitioned the queen to be recalled in January, and his return was authorized that May.⁶⁹ With the departure of Fitzwilliam came the end of the reform movement among the Irish viceroys—from that point on the movement to conquer Ireland became more and more violent, relying more and more on martial law and less on persuasion and cooperation with the Irish people and their customs.⁷⁰

While Fitzwilliam had used a number of different approaches, including financial reform, gradual Anglicization, and factional diplomacy in addition to military action, his recall signaled an end to many of these methods in favor of exclusively violent intervention. In the years between 1519, when Henry VIII's attention was first drawn to Ireland and 1594, when Fitzwilliam was recalled to Ireland by Elizabeth, the English presence in Ireland had maintained its objective while undergoing a significant shift in structure and method. From a naïve

⁶⁸ Brady, 233.

⁶⁹ Mary Ann Lyons, 'Fitzwilliam, Sir William (1526–1599)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.wm.edu/view/article/9664>, accessed 10 March 2011]

⁷⁰ Canny, 121.

assumption that the Irish would prove amenable to a program of gradual reform and Anglicization, the English had progressed to a system of militarized Anglicization, actively targeting the native culture through legal measures and enforcing said measures with a constantly increasing number of soldiers. Additionally, the English government in Ireland slowly moved away from a policy of attempting to work with/through the preexisting power structures in Ireland. Instead, the viceroys increasingly relied on martial law to command the cooperation of the Irish lords. It is in this context of escalating violence and militarism that the institution of the *filid* must be approached.

Chapter 2: Who were the *filid*

As the century progressed and the actions of the English Viceroy became more violent, the English conception of the Irish became correspondingly coarser and more negative. The Irish were increasingly seen as barbarians, and it became perceived as the English nation's duty to convert the 'sa[l]vages' to a more civilized, more English, way of life. As part of the ongoing war against the indigenous culture, Gaelic traditions and customs were discouraged, even outlawed. Local manners of dress and hair styles were frowned on, and legal customs that differed from English common law, including *tanistry*, honor prices⁷¹ and other aspects of *brehon* law, were proscribed. This flurry of legal activity in the mid to late sixteenth century also included many decrees against undesirable persons, including vagrants, idlers, *carroghs* or gamblers, and most importantly to this author, harpers, rhymers and poets.⁷²

Bardic poetry is one of the most valuable Irish language primary sources available to us from this time period. It was a formal, highly stylized literary structure that simultaneously supported and celebrated traditional Gaelic culture, and for this reason its creators were targeted by the English. Bardic poetry was the product of the *filid*, a class of Irish society with a long and glorious history. They were a class of highly educated professionals⁷³ who occupied an elevated place in Gaelic society alongside the *brehons* or lawkeepers, and doctors.⁷⁴ The *filid* were esteemed for their knowledge of Irish history and tradition. They were also said by some to

⁷¹ The amount of money that had to be paid to one's family or lord if a person were killed—*brehon* law punished most crimes through fines and honor prices, rather than physical punishment or imprisonment.

⁷² Bagwell, 454.

⁷³ Phillip Freeman, *The Philosophers and the Druids: A Journey Among the Ancient Celts* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 139.

⁷⁴ While the English laws refer to harpers and rhymers, they were actually addressing these poets, not average musicians. The confusion may have come about because bardic poetry was traditionally accompanied by harp music.

possess magic powers, including the power to prophesy the future.⁷⁵ They also served in a diplomatic capacity—*filid* are frequently mentioned acting as messengers, standing as surety during negotiations and treaties, and serving as arbitrators in political disputes. Their presence at peace talks was expected, and *Ollamhs* appear as witnesses to many important agreements, including the 1566 ‘Covenant between Mageoghagan and the Fox’ which regulated tributes, and several other treaties between different Irish lords from the same time period.⁷⁶ *Filid* could also act as a ‘pledge’ of peace, although the full implications of this term are difficult to determine without more complete sources.

Extensive training and education was required to become a *fili*—by the early modern era bardic colleges and similar schools had been set up by established bardic families to provide the necessary instruction.⁷⁷ Such training was extremely rigorous: would-be *filid* of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries retreated to their school for a period of at least seven years⁷⁸ before attaining the rank of *ollamb filiodh*, although some accounts describe training periods as long as twelve years.⁷⁹ During this time students internalized and mastered complicated meters and literary conventions, as well as large quantities of other information—an *ollamh* had to be competent in composing poems, in *féineachas* (native law), and in *coimhghne* (historical knowledge, specifically genealogical).⁸⁰ A new language was required, as bardic poetry maintained essentially the same formalized version of the Irish language for hundreds of years. By the

⁷⁵ Eleanor Knott, *Irish Classical Poetry (Filíocht na Sgol)*, (Cork: The Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland, 1966), 7.

⁷⁶ Breatnach, 56.

⁷⁷ *Transactions of the Ossianic Society, Vol.5*, (Dublin, 1860), xxii.

⁷⁸ Osborn Bergin, *Irish Bardic Poetry* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1970), 6.

⁷⁹ Pádraig A. Breathnach, “The Chief’s Poet”, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, Vol.83C (1983), 37.

⁸⁰ Edel Breathnach and Bernadette Cunningham, *Writing Irish History: the Four Masters and Their World*, (Dublin, Trinity College Dublin, 2007), 20.

sixteenth century it had diverged significantly from spoken Irish.⁸¹ Latin was a common second language and classical allusions were not uncommon in bardic poetry. A *fili* composing a new work would lie in the dark, preferably in a cave away from distractions, creating and organizing stanzas silently in his mind until it met with his satisfaction.⁸² This method was intended to cut down on interruptions and distractions, something that would be crucial considering the complicated meter and the fact that some bardic poems could run as long as forty or fifty quatrains.⁸³ A poem written by Fear Flatha O’Gnive in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century criticizes another *fili* for breaking with tradition and composing a poem while on horseback. “Without any need of a good teacher for thy verse thou framest fine scholarly art on horseback! Without a dark hut, without hardship...a view of mountains, an airy prospect are thine.”⁸⁴ The poem takes a sarcastic tone, proclaiming the great genius that must belong to the subject if he need not resort to the traditional methods of creating his poetry. O’Gnive continues, “As for myself, should I make a poem, I like—a thing which keeps me from error—a barrier to keep out the sunlight, and dim couches to guard me. If I did not close my eyelids between me and the bright rays as a protecting veil against the daylight, it would ruin my artistry.”⁸⁵ By describing his own adherence to the traditional methods, he celebrates the discipline and skill traditionally associated with the *filid*. O’Gnive stands as a defender of tradition, highlighting the *fili*’s traditional role as keeper and protector of Gaelic heritage and culture.

The *filid*’s creations were a high-priced commodity in early modern Ireland. In exchange for such poems patrons gave generously, dispensing gifts of money, clothing, horses, sheep,

⁸¹ Tony Crowley, *War of Words: The Politics of Language in Ireland 1537-2004*, (Oxford University Press, 2005), 22.

⁸² Blácam, 90, 88.

⁸³ Bergin, 12.

⁸⁴ Bergin, 265.

⁸⁵ Bergin, 266.

cattle and even land.⁸⁶ Although topics could include anything from politics to religion to love, the majority of the poems that still exist today are panegyrics, composed to praise and honor the *fili*'s lord or perhaps to commemorate some grand event like a marriage or a christening.⁸⁷ Because personal honor was so important in Gaelic culture, it behooved the lords to give liberally in exchange for the social credit that the praise poems granted them.⁸⁸

Bardic poetry was seldom performed by the author; a piece was typically declaimed by a *reacaire*, or reciter, accompanied by a musician strumming on a harp. Nearly all bardic poetry was accompanied by harp music, although they weren't songs *per se*. They were chanted alongside a rhythmic drone generally supplied by a harp. The continued existence of so many of these poems is due to the existence of what are known as *duanairi*, or poem-books. These types of books were kept by the Irish lords, and in them were recorded all of the poems written in their honor.⁸⁹ These poems commonly referred to the distinguished lineage of the lord in question, his physical attributes, his hospitality, and his victories in battle and diplomacy. Often he would be compared to figures of legend, creating a parallel between the past and present and incorporating the modern lords into the Celtic pantheon of gods and heroes.⁹⁰ Another literary trope was the mention of the high king of Ireland. In many of the praise poems found in the manuscripts and *duanairi*, the patron in question is put forward as the man capable of uniting Ireland against the foreigners, or of the man worthy of playing husband to the female manifestation of Ireland. Tadhg Dall O'hUiginn instructed Conn O'Donnel, "Raise the veil from Ireland; long hath she sought a spouse, finding no mate for her couch after the happiness of the men of *Fál* was

⁸⁶ Tadhg Dall O'hUiginn, *The Bardic Poems of Tadhg Dall O hUiginn*, edited and translated by Eleanor Knott (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1926), 62.

⁸⁷ Lennon, 62.

⁸⁸ Brendan Kane, *The Politics and Culture of Honor in Britain and Ireland, 1541-1641*, (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 24.

⁸⁹ Marc Caball, "Bardic Poetry and the Analysis of Gaelic Mentalities", *History Ireland* 2/2 (1994), 47.

⁹⁰ Edel Breathnach and Bernadette Cunningham, 20.

blasted.”⁹¹ In a later poem honoring Cu Chonnacht, the Maguire, he declared, “Cú Chonnacht, by his qualities, deserved to be chosen beyond the Children of *Míl*; a king is made from the seed of Donn in preference to (all) the kings of Eber’s land.”⁹² This conferral of the hypothetical high kingship was a literary convention, and the same *fili* would think nothing of promising it to two different lords, in two different poems. He was not perjuring himself; bardic poetry was intrinsically hyperbolic, and the convention was such that each patron was viewed in isolation—for example, a *fili* wouldn’t mention a lord other than his patron in any panegyric (there was one exception to this rule, which will be discussed later).⁹³ These poems were products of a long literary tradition and strengthened the cultural standing of their subjects.

Any man who angered one of the *filid* ran the risk of being satirized, a serious fate in an honor-based society like that of the Gaels. Satires were biting, wickedly clever pieces that the Gaels credited with having magical powers. It was said that a *fili* could raise boils on a man’s face, or even shame a man to death with the power of his words.⁹⁴ There are references to such satires in legal agreements of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in which the *filid* declare themselves as surety for the good behavior of both parties by pledging to satire whoever breaks the agreement. One such agreement was drawn up in 1539 regarding the custody of Sligo Castle,⁹⁵ Another dates from 1580 and consists of an agreement between the Lord of the County Fermanagh and the Abbot of the Franciscan Monastery of Lisgoole.⁹⁶ This was one of the ways that the *filid* could stand serve as pledges of peace, as was previously mentioned. Satires were also composed for more personal reasons, usually to avenge some perceived slight against a *fili*.

⁹¹ Tadhg Dall O’hUiggin, 1.

⁹² Tadhg Dall O’hUiggin, 45.

⁹³ Dunne, 14.

⁹⁴ Lennon, 62.

⁹⁵ Edited by Maura Carney, *Irish Historical Studies* iii (1943) 282-96.

⁹⁶ Printed from Nat. Lib. of Irel. MS Harris Collectanea, vol.xiii 321, by K.W. Nicholls ‘The Lisgoole Agreement of 1580’ *Clogher Rec.* vii (1969) 27-33; and cf. C. McGrath at *Clogher Rec.* ii (1957) 12, *Éigse* iv 69.

One example was written by Tadhg Dall O Huiginn in the late sixteenth century about the O'Hara family. He describes a loathsome, rag-tag troop of six men who came to his house and drank the last of his milk. The descriptions are anything but complimentary, criticizing their weapons, their clothing, and their general outward appearance. "The likeness of a fellow not worth a fleshworm was along with the five; a gaunt, transparent sort of fellow, he was a poor commodity on inspection." Having singled out each member of the offending group, he then proceeds to offer an sarcastic prayer for their safety—"I beseech God who shed His blood, since it is but decay for them to be alive—it is scarcely to be called living—that none may slay the troop of six." In retaliation for this slight, the O'Haras cut out his tongue.⁹⁷

This action, while demonstrating the seriousness with which the Irish lords viewed the *filid*, suggests that they had already fallen somewhat in Gaelic society from their place in the not-so-distant past when *filid* were considered inviolate. Until sometime in the fifteenth century, *filid* accompanied their lords to battle in search of subject matter for their poems, watching from a safe distance, secure in the knowledge that even their enemies would hesitate to injure a *fili*. According to brehon law, the honor price of an *ollamh* was equal to that of a king.⁹⁸ Although the English attempted to eradicate the brehon laws that dealt with honor prices, the conception of a *fili* as on par with a king continued into the sixteenth century, and they remained very important and highly respected within their community. Not only were they valued in their own right for their knowledge and learning, they also occupied a position of power and influence. This is particularly true of the *ollamh flatha*, or Chief's Poet. The chief's poet was the highest rank that a *fili* could obtain in Irish society. It was a position of power and importance, granting him not only a comfortable and secure living but the ear of the chief. While ordinary *filid* were

⁹⁷ O'Huiginn, 186.

⁹⁸ Breathnach, 78.

forced to travel the land seeking patronage, the chief's poet was attached to one particular ruler in a contractual agreement. The *fili* was obligated to compose praise poetry in honor of his patron, to serve him as messenger or arbitrator as the situation arose, and also to act as confidante and advisor. Additionally, were the *ollamh flatha* to compose any poetry honoring someone other than his chief, he was obligated to include one stanza honoring his Patron, referred to by historians as a 'duty quatrain.' In this way the *fili* spread his patron's fame beyond the lord's borders.⁹⁹

In exchange for these services, a chief's poet enjoyed certain privileges. They received the same sorts of gifts and payments that a wandering *fili* could get in exchange for their work, but they were also permitted to sit next to the chief while feasting, and to share his counsel.¹⁰⁰ O hEódhasa's poem *Mór an t-ainm ollamh flatha* lists the privileges of the chief's poet as "loving favor, the primest liberality, precedence in counsel, the king's shoulder, the sharing of his bed, compensation for failure to protect him."¹⁰¹ Although some of the phrasing may appear confusing to a modern audience, he is essentially expecting largesse and favor in court, the position of privy councilor, and the protection of his person. The reference to sharing the lord's bed is something that appears frequently in bardic poetry, and is explained by a common literary conceit in which the relationship between lord and *fili* is likened to the spousal relationship between husband and wife.¹⁰² O Huiginn described the relationship between himself and his lord, Cathal O'Conor in a eulogy celebrating O'Conor's death, saying, "I used to have thy confidence and thy counsel, thou branch of Leyney, thy elbow and half thy couch, an award which no gifts

⁹⁹ Breathnach, 55.

¹⁰⁰ Breathnach, 45.

¹⁰¹ *Mór an t-ainm ollamh flatha*

¹⁰² Breathnach, 43.

could excel.”¹⁰³ It is clear that the position of *ollamh flatha* was one of great power and influence politically, in addition to being valued for their literary contributions.¹⁰⁴

The educated professions of Ireland up to this time were hereditary, and chieftains of different regions tended to select their *ollamh flathas* from specific families. For example, the O’Dálaighs of Cork, Kerry and Limerick were *ollamhs* to the Earls of Desmond; the Tirconnel branch of the Mac an Bhairds typically served the O’Domhnaills; and the O’hUiginns of Sligo were poets to the O Conchubhairs.¹⁰⁵ When a new chief took power, he generally reinstated the *ollamh flatha* of his predecessor, but the position was still primarily merit based, and it was not unheard of for a *fili* to fall out of favor with his patron. There are a number of bardic poems in which the author humbly begs pardon and asks for reconciliation with his lord.¹⁰⁶ Nor was the hereditary nature of the position foolproof—there were frequently challengers to any one *fili*’s candidacy, and it is possible to trace the rise and fall of different bardic families in the different regions of Ireland throughout the country’s history.¹⁰⁷

The *filid* as a group, and particularly the *ollamh flatha*, were an integral part of Irish society leading up to and during the sixteenth century. From their position as keepers of the histories and collective memory of the Irish, the *filid* used their poems to weave a web of continuity in the Irish polity that *tanistry* could not. They were the journalists, intellectuals, political advisors and rock stars of their time, all rolled into one. It is no surprise that the English who came into contact with them felt pressed to act against them in some way, but the different methods they used and the rationales and goals behind their actions are worth investigating. The

¹⁰³ O’ Huiginn, 63.

¹⁰⁴ Marc Caball, *Poets and Politics: Reaction and Continuity in Irish Poetry, 1558-1625*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 3.

¹⁰⁵ Breatnach, 64, 61.

¹⁰⁶ Breatnach, 72.

¹⁰⁷ Breatnach, 75.

trajectory taken by anti-harper rhetoric and legislation in English records is a gradual one, influenced by world events and by the reactions of the *filid* themselves.

Chapter 3: The Irish in the English Imagination

The distinction between *ollamh* and *ollamh flatha* was not the only distinction within the ranks of the poets and musicians of Ireland. It was a highly regimented group of people, and the different professions within the *filid* were strictly delineated. When the English arrived, they lumped all of these performers together under multiple different headings, making it difficult to determine today what profession the individuals mentioned in historical records actually fulfilled. The most common terms to appear in English records and Fiants¹⁰⁸ are rhymer (rimer) and bard, but they were also referred to as harpers, poets, and chroniclers.¹⁰⁹

It is entirely possible that the English fixation on the word “bard” was accidental, a misunderstanding due to cultural differences. However, there is also the interesting possibility that the English deliberately chose the word because of its connotations. There was an established hierarchy within the ranks of the *filid* themselves based on talent and experience. The *filid* were ranked highly as poets who studied extensively, taught, and composed, while the term “bard” referred to a subordinate who simply performed the works of others or perhaps popular verses and music.¹¹⁰ A bard was a lesser being in the eyes of the Irish, less polished, less accomplished, and less venerated. In lumping all of the *filid* together under the name of bard, the English lowered all of the poets to the bards’ level. The Tudors were dealing with Irish and Anglo-Irish lords politically and diplomatically, causing the insult to reach Irish ears fairly quickly. These terms appeared in laws and proclamations as well as literature, a medium with which the Irish would have been intimately familiar. So it may have simply been an effort on the part of the English to demean and lower one of the major bulwarks of Gaelic culture.

¹⁰⁸ Warrants to the Court of Chancery in Ireland dealing with many government activities, in this case, addressing the grant of pardons to Irish subjects.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas F. O’Rahilly, *Irish Poets, Historians, and Judges in English Documents, 1538-1615*, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, Vol. 36(1921-1924), 87.

¹¹⁰ Knott, 50.

There is another possibility. While the Celts had traditionally been portrayed as barbaric to a certain degree, the English image of the Irish in the sixteenth century was increasingly savage. This declining image catered to the paternalistic imperialism that the English used to justify their interference in the lives of the Irish people. The *filid* challenged this assumption by their very existence as an educated elite. Poetry was a mark of civilization, and the complicated, strictly metered poetry of the Irish *ollamhs* even more so. By designating to all Irish poets the rank of bard, the English were endeavoring to correct this discrepancy to strengthen their own interpretations of the Irish. The bards were an earthier, more natural breed of artist—they played popular music and catered to the general public, which made them more natural and acceptable to the English conception of Irish culture.¹¹¹ Without this redefinition of the bards, the English justification of their subjugation of the Irish was inherently flawed.

The Irish bards appeared regularly in the English literature about Ireland from the Tudor era, particularly during Elizabeth's reign. Not only were they mentioned in letters and legal papers, they also appeared in various pamphlets and other publications addressing the state of Ireland. Many Englishmen were eager to offer their own opinions on how best to deal with the "Irish problem," a dilemma which only worsened as the century went on. As the western island came more and more into the public consciousness throughout the course of the century, there was a great deal of curiosity about Ireland and the Irish among of the English people, resulting in a wide range of literature discussing Ireland from the English perspective.¹¹² By examining several of these, it is possible to obtain an understanding of the English perception of Irish culture, in this case focusing on the descriptions of bards and poets.

¹¹¹ McCabe, 39.

¹¹² David Beers Quinn, *Elizabethans and the Irish*, (New York: Published by Cornell University Press for The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1966), 22.

It is necessary however, to begin with a brief recognition of Giraldus Cambrensis, or Gerald of Wales, who penned the oldest English account of the Irish people and Gaelic culture known today. Archdeacon of St. Davids and a frequent guest of the Norman court, he wrote his *Topographica Hibernica* in the late 1180s. Written as it was in the midst of the Norman invasion of Ireland, it is no surprise that the work portrays the Irish as barbaric and primitive.¹¹³ It is here that the conception of English superiority to the Irish was first articulated. In the centuries following, attention was diverted from Ireland, with the result that Gerald's description reigned unchallenged, and gradually became accepted as fact. Because little was written about Ireland between the twelfth century when Gerald wrote and the sixteenth century when interest in Ireland was renewed, his *Topographica Hibernica* and *Expugnatio Hibernica* greatly influenced the Tudor writers. Gerald was an influence on many Elizabethan writers, but many discounted him as a primary source in favor of their own observations. Despite this divergence, such literature tended to follow his tradition in spite of themselves, and he had re-emerged as an authority on the subject by the end of the sixteenth century.

One of the most detailed accounts of the Irish poets during Elizabeth's reign was written by an English apothecary living in Dublin called Thomas Smyth. Smyth's *Information for Ireland* was written in 1561 in the form of a letter to the Privy Council, and consists primarily of an in-depth description of the bards. It is difficult to determine his precise motives, but it is likely that he was motivated in part by professional rivalry—in 1566 he was awarded an annual stipend, because the natives' penchant for patronizing local healers and traditional physicians who were frequently associated with the *filid* hurt his business.¹¹⁴ *Information for Ireland* was

¹¹³ Joseph Theodoor Leerssen, *Mere Irish & Fíor-ghal: Studies in the Idea of Irish Nationality, its development and literary expression prior to the 19th century*, (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1986), 35.

¹¹⁴ Seamus Dean et al., *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 330.

part of a campaign to obtain this stipend, by explaining the level of prestige still enjoyed by the native professionals and thus highlighting his own difficulties. He is the only English writer to address the distinction between different ranks of the *filid*, although his account doesn't quite tally with other primary sources in every particular. Despite these small inconsistencies, the level of detail included by Smyth, particularly regarding the different ranks of *filid* is important, especially because such distinctions were increasingly disregarded by English writers. Smyth divides the Irish 'rimers' into 4 septs—the brehounes (*brehons*), or judges; the shankee (*seanachie*), or pedigrrers; the aosdan (*aois-dana*¹¹⁵), or bards; and the fillis(*fileadhes*), or poets.¹¹⁶ Smyth portrays all four septs as being harmful to the commonwealth in one way or another. Firstly he addresses the *brehons*, the legal men of Gaelic Ireland. According to Smyth, these are wealthy men who harbor vagabonds and idlers and are responsible for maintaining rebels against the English crown. Additionally, they pass legal judgments despite their ignorance of English law, slowing the spread of English law in Ireland and harming the entire realm. In point of fact, although the *brehons* were on equal footing with the *ollamh* within the Irish hierarchy, they were not targeted in the same way the poets were, and tended to be excluded from the anti-harper laws. It is possible that this is because the *brehons* were more willing to accept English laws and English rule than the poets—the *brehons* had a place in English law once they had learned it, and there were instances of *brehons* serving as judges and lawyers in Irish courts of English law, as well as cooperating in the political suppression of bardic families.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Meaning men of songs

¹¹⁶ Bardism in 1561", *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, First Series, Vol. 6, (1858), 166.

¹¹⁷ Nerys Patterson, "Gaelic Law and the Tudor Conquest of Ireland: The Social Background of the Sixteenth-Century Recensions of the Psuedo-Historical Prologue to the Seanchas-Már", *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol.27, No.107 (May, 1991),94.

Smyth then addresses the shankees, or pedigrers—those members of the literati who were responsible for keeping track of the genealogies of the leading Irish families. While originally and possibly even at this point in time this was indeed a separate profession, by the late sixteenth century this task had fallen to the *filid*, and the chief's poet was also responsible for recording his lord's pedigree.¹¹⁸ The shankee, as Smyth calls them, are accused of giving aid to rebels and furthermore of convincing the ignorant lord that they are descended from heroes, consequently causing them to run mad and wreak havoc. Through the provision of impressive pedigrees, he claimed, the shankee were legitimizing the Irish lords' claims to power, and thus causing problems for the English colonists. This argument will reappear again and again throughout the century as an example of their importance in sustaining Irish resistance to Anglicization, and is an important part of the anti-bardic mentality. Indeed, it underlies Smyth's complaints about all four classes of *filid*.

At this point Smyth turns to the *Aeodan*, or the bards, as he says they are called in English. These in particular he claims to be “very hurtfull to the commonwhealle, for they chiffllie manyntayne the rebells; and and, further, they do cause them that would be true, to be rebellious theves, extorcioners, murtherers, ravners, yea and worse it if were possible.” After this follows a description of the evils enacted by the bards—that they incite the young Irish lords and chieftains to rebellion by composing poems praising their predecessors and themselves, until the ignorant men believe themselves to be great heroes, and proceed to gather a band of men to raid the surrounding area, stealing cattle, ransacking and burning cottages, and generally causing mayhem and death. After the destruction is concluded, Smyth envisions a celebratory feast featuring the rymer who first made the ryme that caused all the trouble. However, Smyth is careful to note that the rymer does not come alone—he brings with him his Rakry (*recaire*) or

¹¹⁸ Lennon, 63.

reciter, who shall utter the ryme, his Harper, who plays during the recitation of the rhyme, and his Bard, whom Smyth describes merely as, ‘a kinde of folise fellowe.’ At the end of the recitation, all four of these men are expected to receive rich gifts from the patron in whose honor the ryme was composed. The argument that the bards instigated rebellion and sustained cultural pride in the Irish lords was the major concern that spurred the anti-bardic government policies of sixteenth-century England.

Of the “Fillis,” or poets, Smyth does not have much to say, other than they perform all the functions of the other three, and additionally prophecy the future. ‘Theis are great mayntayners of whitches and other vile matters; to the great blasfemye of God; and to the great impoverishinge of the comenwealthe.’¹¹⁹ This is probably a reference to the early ties between the *fili* and the druids, and although it is quite possible that the poets were still considered prophets by the sixteenth century, it is difficult to find any native primary sources to back up this assertion—the only mentions of the *fili*’s prophetic powers during this time seem to be from English sources, many of whom were probably getting their information from Smyth. It is possible that he emphasized the magical powers of the poets in an attempt to connect them with paganism, a signifier of barbarism in the English mind. Driven by professional jealousy, Smyth’s work focuses primarily on the ‘rimers’ of Ireland, offering only a passing glimpse of the surrounding Irish culture and placing the blame for the slow progress of Anglicization in Ireland squarely at the feet of the intellectuals. Fortunately, there are other works from the period that more than make up for this lack.

Few Elizabethan authors would wholly support Smythe’s view that a sophisticated Irish intellectual elite was responsible for inhibiting Anglicization. John Derricke’s *Image of Irelande* was written in 1578 and published in 1581. It is a detailed defense of Henry Sidney’s deputyship,

¹¹⁹ Smyth, in “Bardism in 1561”, 166.

part verse part prose and accompanied by 12 woodcut illustrations. The dedication is to his son Sir Philip Sidney, making it reasonable to assume that the author was a client of the Sidney family.¹²⁰ The first portion of the work consists of a detailed description of the Irish woodkernes,¹²¹ using this as background information for the second portion, which consists of an in depth account of some of Sidney's military exploits, culminating in the defeat of Rory Og O'More and the submission of Turlough Luineach O'Neill. Accompanying woodcuts offer a prime example of the English depiction of the Irish.

The first illustration shows several Irish woodkerne preparing for war. Although the wording of the accompanying stanza is polite at first, admiring their appearance and referring to them as "trimly dressed", this flattering depiction is soon given the lie, and he goes on to malign their character, claiming that each kern is "honest as the devil; and constant like the wavering wind in their imaginations."¹²² The Irish are being painted as an untrustworthy, flighty people who will betray at the first opportunity and cannot be depended on in war or diplomacy. In a following stanza Derricke likens the kernes to dogs: "Here creeps out of St. Filcher's den a pack of prowling mates, /Most hurtful to the English Pale and noisome to the states."¹²³ His word choice deliberately draws a parallel between the Irish soldiers and animals, adding a subtext of barbarism to a passage that directly accuses the Irish of harming the English commonwealth. The passage accompanies a woodcut which reveals the ultimate goal of these same woodkernes to be

¹²⁰ Andrew Hadfield, 'Derricke, John (fl. 1578–1581)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7537>, accessed 5 April 2011]

¹²¹ Traditional Irish soldiers, typically light infantry

¹²² John Derricke, *The Image of Ireland, with a Discovery of Woodkern in Elizabethan Ireland: A Selection of Writings by Elizabethan Writers on Ireland*, ed. James P. Meyers, (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1983), 39.

¹²³ Derricke in Meyers, 40.



Figure 1



Figure 2

an Irish village. They are shown setting fire to the cottages and pillaging their own people.¹²⁴

This example of the Irish preying on their own kind is calculated to evoke disgust at the barbaric nature of the Irish and to promote Sidney's military campaign.

The next woodcut is perhaps the most well-known, portraying an Irish lord sitting down to a feast, with his attendants around him.¹²⁵ Of particular note is the presence of the harper, who is seated in the foreground. The scene is described by an accompanying stanza, rife with the same demeaning tone that runs throughout the piece. The context of the scene within the larger work is particularly important here—it must be remembered that the guests of the feast are the same men who were shown savagely attacking their own people in the previous frame. The “thieves” sit down to dinner while others prepare the meal, skinning the ox and fashioning a cooking vessel of the hide, since the Irish are too uncivilized to possess pots. The end of the stanza reads, “because the cheer is deemed of little worth,/Except the same be intermixed and laced with Irish mirth,/Both bard and harper is prepared, which by their cunning art/Do strike and cheer up all the guests with comfort at the heart.”¹²⁶ The first two lines are referencing the perceived Irish stubbornness in clinging to their own customs and traditions instead of submitting to Anglicization. The last two appear at first glance to be belittling the influence of the bards, relegating them to the role of mere entertainers. However, keeping the context of the illustration in mind, the fact that the bard cheers and comforts these thieves and murderers hearkens back to the oft repeated accusation that the *filid* encouraged and supported Irish rebellion. Derricke's illustrations and accompanying captions offer a disdainful image of the Irish, emphasizing their uncultured and barbaric customs as well as their animalistic characters.

¹²⁴ Figure 1

¹²⁵ Figure 2

¹²⁶ Derricke in Myers, 41.

It is clear that the tenacity of the native Irish regarding their customs and traditions became increasingly irksome to the English over time. The works of Smyth and Derricke exemplify the disdain and frustration felt by the English towards what they viewed as a resistant, rebellious native population, using a common characterization of the Irish to further their own goals. The works of these two men are limited to descriptions; they define the problem rather than offering solutions.

Throughout the sixteenth century, however, a great many pamphlets were published suggesting various different ways to address ‘the Irish Problem.’ One of the most well-known is that of Edmund Spenser, best known as author of the *Faerie Queen*. He wrote his *A View on the Present State of Ireland* in 1595, but it wasn’t published until 1633 due to disputes among the printers and stationers. At the time when it was written, Spenser had lived in Ireland for approximately fifteen years, first as secretary to Lord Deputy Grey, and then in a series of other jobs in the civil service after Grey’s recall in 1582.¹²⁷ The *View* takes the form of a dialogue between two men, Eudoxus and Irenius. The former is an Englishman, largely ignorant of Ireland and curious to know why such a rich land is not being colonized; the latter is an authority on the subject, likely a member of the New English, as was Spenser himself.

In the first half of the dialogue Irenius catalogues the faults of the Irish, describing their customs, traditions, manner of living, and all other aspects of their culture. Included is a brief description of Irish bards, which includes the distinction between bards and actual poets and the accusation that they instigate violence and rebellion, rather than fulfilling their traditional duty to “set forth the praises of the good and virtuous, and to beat down and disgrace the bad and

¹²⁷ Andrew Hadfield, ‘Spenser, Edmund (1552?–1599)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26145>, accessed 5 April 2011]

vicious.”¹²⁸ This passage is particularly interesting considering Spenser’s own reputation as a poet. Eudoxus suggests that it is not unnatural for the Irish to honor their bards, as poets have been renowned throughout history and in many cultures for their “sweet inventions and most witty lays.” Irenius’s response manages to uphold the reputation of “real” poets (including Spenser himself), while at the same time distancing and deriding the bards for their influence on the Irish people. In Spenser’s argument, the distinguishing characteristic is the subject of the poetry—true poets celebrate good men, setting an example for others. The bards, on the other hand, celebrate “whomsoever they find to be most licentious of life, most bold and lawless in his doings, most dangerous and desperate in all parts of disobedience and rebellious disposition.”¹²⁹ He does not claim that the Irish poets are without talent, but he does emphasize the more natural, less refined form of talent that the English tried to superimpose upon the Irish. Irenius claims to have had several Irish poems translated for his own edification, which “savored of sweet wit and good invention, but skilled not of the goodly ornaments of poetry...they were sprinkled with some pretty flowers of their own natural device, which gave good grace and comeliness unto them.”¹³⁰ This is the clearest possible articulation of the English attempt to redefine the Irish poetry as a natural, almost childlike affectation, lacking the civic refinement of true literature. This passage furthers the English attempt to see the Irish as inferior, childlike and uncivilized, while at the same time aggrandizing the work of the English poets.

What differentiates Spenser’s work from any discussed up to this point is that his second half sets forth a new plan for the subjugation of Ireland. This plan, proposed by Irenius, consists of total military domination, destroying Irish culture almost entirely before commencing the

¹²⁸ Edmund Spenser, *A View on the Present State of Ireland* in *Elizabethan Ireland: A Selection of Writings by Elizabethan Writers on Ireland*, ed. James P. Meyers, (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1983), 102.

¹²⁹ Spenser in Myers, 103.

¹³⁰ Spenser in Myers, 104.

gradual reform movements that had been espoused in the past. The violence and extremity of this plan shocks Eudoxus, but eventually he too concludes that it is the only solution. The crux of Irenius's argument is that the Irish are a barbaric people and only the sword is capable of bringing them to civilization. Imposing English law will not be effective, for civilized law cannot be applied to an uncivilized people: "It is vaine to prescribe lawes, where no man careth for keeping of them, nor feareth the daunger for breaking of them."¹³¹ Such is the barbarity of the Irish that even the civilized medium of poetry has been turned to uncivilized purposes, catering to the arbitrary and tyrannical whims of the Irish lords.

Instead of attempting reform via legal means, Spenser proposes to begin the reformation of Ireland by cutting away the evils of Ireland through the use of the sword. A massive force of 1100 English soldiers is to be dispatched to Ireland in order to hunt down and eliminate the rebellious natives. They shall be garrisoned throughout the country, which shall be completely laid to waste, so that the rebels have no food or succor. It is only after this complete and total military domination that the Irish will be able and willing to accept English law.¹³² The mass slaughter will be followed by the creation of an Irish Parliament, the creation of an English constitution in Ireland and the establishment of English institutions and commissions to confirm existing landholders in their holdings. The plan following this near apocalyptic attack on the Irish was thus nearly identical to the surrender and regrant policy enacted by Henry VIII in the mid-sixteenth century. These actions would stimulate a reformation of manners, brought about through English encouragement of agriculture, domestic crafts and industries, which will finally make possible religious reform by gradual persuasion and the training of native preachers.¹³³

¹³¹ Edmund Spenser, *A View on the Present State of Ireland*, edited by Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 92.

¹³² Spenser, 96.

¹³³ Brady, 32.

These had been the basic objectives of the English government in Ireland since the 1540s. What differentiated Spenser's plan from those that had come before was the level of violence, as well as his firm conviction that one had to know the Irish in order to rule them. In this he was forwarding the agenda of the New English, men who lived among the Irish and understood the political climate better than distant politicians, and who felt an increasing frustration with the lack of success regarding their conquest and colonization of Ireland.¹³⁴

It was clear to the English at this point that the *filid* served as the legitimizing force behind the lords of Ireland. There was a great deal of infighting amongst the Irish clans, and one of the surest ways for a new lord to strengthen his claim was to commission a poem celebrating his noble lineage, handsome figure, success in battle, and general rights and abilities to rule. Nicholas Dawtrey, another member of the New English, recognized this as a problem for Anglicization in his 1597 *A Booke of Questions and Answers*. Dawtrey was a soldier from Hampshire who first arrived in Ireland in the 1560s. He served at increasingly prestigious posts in Ulster until 1585, when he was sent to Scotland on a diplomatic mission, after which he refused to return to Ireland due to quarrels with the Lord Deputy and the Chief Commissioner of Ulster. He later served as sergeant major general of her majesty's forces at Tilbury, and wrote a great many letters and memoranda regarding the submission of Ireland in the 1590s, attempting to gain a new military post.¹³⁵ Because of this motivation, a great deal of the work is dedicated to the military structure and habits of the Irish, but he also addresses what he believed to be the underlying issues preventing Irish subjugation. Dawtrey held that one of the primary reasons behind England's lack of success in Ireland was the sovereign claims of certain old families like the O'Neills. Their attitude of entitlement and their expectations of kingship made it difficult for

¹³⁴ Spenser, xix.

¹³⁵ Nicholas Dawtrey, "A booke of questions and answers concerning the warrs or rebellions of the kingdome of Irelande", edited by Hiram Morgan, *Analecta Hibernica*, No. 36 (1995), 82.

the English to gain control.¹³⁶ This affectation of sovereignty was a product of the bardic order and their work. The *filid* celebrated and encouraged the ‘royal’ families’ histories and past glories while at the same time praising their contemporary scions and encouraging them to meet or surpass their ancestors’ great deeds. It was Dawtrey’s belief that any success in Ireland would only be achieved by first liquidating these royal families, as well as the *filid* who support them: “These septes as they rise in rebellion must be cutt off, untill they be extinguished; so must all rymers & Bards, with the Irish Brehuns, for these be secret records of ther Irish tyranny, and remembrances of the auntient state and services.”¹³⁷ This is one of the most eloquent English descriptions of the true importance of the *filid*’s position in Gaelic culture, recognizing their position as keepers of a collective Irish memory and protectors of the Irish culture and heritage in the form of pedigrees and histories. Of course, because he is English, he sees this preservation as sinister, using phrases like ‘secret records of ther Irish tyranny’ as opposed to more positive terms like chronicles or pedigrees. The educated classes are vilified, their destruction justified because they are the ones who keep alive in the minds of the Irish their former glory prior to English domination. Witness Dawtrey’s explanation of the Earl of Tyrone’s rebellion against Her Majesty Elizabeth after she raised him to Earl from bastardy: “although he be advanced by her majesty from so base a calling, yet yowe must remember that he is cum of the olde race of the bushe, princes of Ulster that were conquered for three or four hundred years past: And the said Earle...holds himself king of Ulster, and his rymer Bards, carroughes, and other parasites, do call him so in many of their flattering rymes, or orations, which did ever lift up the olde Oneales:

¹³⁶ Hiram Morgan, 85.

¹³⁷ Morgan, 87.

And he being a Cubb of the old Foxes, nowe bending all his forces and pollicie, howe he maye gaine the greatest name for a man of war amongst all the Oneales gone before him.”¹³⁸

Dawtreys goal was one of military advancement—he wrote almost constantly in an effort to impress the monarch with his knowledge of the Irish Problem in the hope that she would give him a position in the Irish government. Others wrote for different reasons. One of the most detailed English descriptions of Ireland is Fynes Moryson’s *An Itinerary, written by Fynes Moryson, gent., first in the Latine Tongue, and then translated by him into English: containing his Ten Yeeres Travell through the Twelve Dominions of Germany, Bohmerland, Sweitzerland, Netherland, Denmarke, Poland, Italy, Turkey, France, England, Scotland, and Ireland*,¹³⁹ a sort of encyclopedic travelogue of Europe. The work includes a significant chapter on Ireland, and although the predominant portion concerns itself with the Tyrone rebellion, it also contains a wealth of details concerning the manners and customs of the Irish as he perceived them.¹⁴⁰ Moryson had attended Cambridge and Oxford before serving as secretary to Lord Deputy Mountjoy, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland from 1600-1604. Prior to that appointment he had traveled extensively throughout Europe, maintaining journals and collecting materials for his pet project: a survey of the continent and its inhabitants.¹⁴¹ Although Moryson began collecting information and journaling in the 1590s, the manuscript wasn’t published until 1617. He is included here despite this late date of publication, as his experiences and years of government service took place during the last decade of the sixteenth century.

¹³⁸ Morgan, 88.

¹³⁹ Hereafter referred to simply as *An Itinerary*

¹⁴⁰ Alfred Webb, *A Compendium of Irish Biography: Comprising Sketches of Distinguished Irishmen, Eminent Persons Connected with Ireland by Office or by their Writings*, (Dublin: M.H. Gill & Sons, 1878), 352.

¹⁴¹ Fynes Moryson, “An Itinerary” in *Elizabethan Ireland: A Selection of Writings by Elizabethan Writers on Ireland*, ed. James P. Meyers, (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1983), 185.

Moryson consistently refers to the people of Ireland as the wild Irish or ‘the mere Irish.’ To modern ears the phrase rings with distain and superiority, and by Moryson’s time the term had acquired this connotation, but when originally coined by the Old English it only meant pure blooded Irish. This conception of a pure bloodline within a barbaric people underscored the uncivilized nature of the Irish, denying them any trace of a civilized heritage.¹⁴² Moryson’s use of this archaic term is prime example of the resurgence of medieval thought regarding Ireland in the Tudor era. The writings of Gerald of Wales inform Tudor thought regarding the Irish, and served as a convenient support for the attempts of the New English to reinforce and propagate the depiction of the Irish as barbaric and inferior.

Moryson’s descriptions address all aspects of life and culture, including food and cooking, living conditions, manners of dress, marriage and courting, legal customs, and entertainment. He is generally uncomplimentary, describing ‘Irish filthiness’ as a physical, moral, and intellectual affliction that has the potential to infect those English who have colonized the country. The culinary habits of the Irish are examined in minute detail and found wanting in that they made oat cakes in place of bread, drank *usquebaugh* (whiskey) instead of the English *aquavita* (a type of brandy) or the ubiquitous beer, and seldom ate beef. He also criticized the unhygienic conditions under which the food was prepared. He described their living conditions as equally filthy, lacking candles, tables, or other furniture, with a large common room where everyone including the lord sleeps together around a central fire.¹⁴³ Having depicted this squalor the author remembers a short poem in Latin on the afflictions of the Irish, which reads, “For vile beasts Ireland hath no fence: /their bodies’ lice, their houses rats possess; /Most wicked priests

¹⁴² Leerssen, 39.

¹⁴³ It is likely that he was actually describing a booley, a temporary dwelling used by the rural Irish during the summertime when they would follow the grazing cattle across the country. Booleying was disdained by the English due to its nomadic nature.

govern their conscience, /and ravening wolves do waste their fields no less.”¹⁴⁴ Moryson’s quatrain underscores his opinion of the Irish as dirty, lice-ridden barbarians who are unable to or unwilling to care for themselves properly.

This depiction of the Irish as crude and uncivilized extended beyond the physical, to the moral and intellectual planes. Not only did the Irish drink whiskey instead of brandy and beer, they drank too much of it, the women as well as the men. Moryson writes, “and since I have in part seen, and often heard from other experiences, that some gentlewomen are so free in this excess, as they would...garausse¹⁴⁵ health after health with the men—not to speak of the wives of the Irish lords...who often drink till they be drunken, or, at least, till they void urine in full assemblies of men—I cannot (though unwillingly) but note the Irish women more especially with this fault, which I have observed in no other part to be a woman’s vice, but only in Bohemia. Yet so, as accusing them, I mean not to excuse the men, and will also confess that I have seen virgins, as well gentlewomen as citizens, commanded by their mothers to retire after they had in courtesy pledged one or two healths.”¹⁴⁶ When Moryson claims drunkenness as a particular vice among the Irish, he is either accusing the Irish of wickedness or of being unable to hold their liquor. Also of note is the particular singling out of the women. Clearly these Irish women who drink with the men are not behaving according to established gender roles, something which reflects poorly on the Irish as a whole, for their women do not live up to English standards. The point here is the regularity of disorder. Ireland is a world turned upside down in which the women drink and illiterates are in charge of remembering the past.

¹⁴⁴ Moryson cited in Myers, 196. Unfortunately, Moryson neglects to cite this quotation, and subsequent scholars have been unable to determine the author, or even the time period in which it was written.

¹⁴⁵ carouse

¹⁴⁶ Moryson cited in Myers, 187.

The analysis of Irish behavior at table leads into a more general analysis of Irish character as a whole. It is not atypical for cultures to ascribe negative personality traits and behavioral flaws to other races, and the English were no exception. Moryson readily revived Giraldus Cambrensis' portrayal of a slothful, barbaric Irishry. A typical introduction to any new topic in his work is 'The Irish in general, more specially the mere Irish, being slothful and given to nothing more than base idleness.'¹⁴⁷ In this particular case it referred to the carrows, or gambling men of Irish culture. In other cases, he addresses their supposed abhorrence of manual arts and civil trades resulting from this idleness, and cites one example, in which he claims that the fishermen of Munster refused to put out to sea in search of fish until beaten and forced out of their houses at the command of the Lord Deputy.¹⁴⁸ It is this idleness that he blames for the aforementioned filth, claiming it makes them, "slovenly and sluttish in their houses and apparel."¹⁴⁹ The order of English civilization is being contrasted with the complete inversion of all things civilized that the English associate with Irish culture.

This inversion extended to the behavior of the people. Irish were considered slothful and negligent, in contrast to the hard-working, energetic English. "This idleness also makes them to love liberty above all things, and likewise naturally to delight in music, so as the Irish harpers are excellent, and their solemn music is much liked of strangers."¹⁵⁰ This overwhelmingly positive remark regarding Irish music and musicians is not unusual for the time—in fact Irish music was something of a fad for a brief period of time in the Elizabethan court, and Queen Elizabeth herself employed an Irish harper at court. This testimonial does not prevent Moryson from coming down hard on the *filid*, however, whom he says are not in fact poets, but rather "rhymers

¹⁴⁷ Moryson in Myers, 202.

¹⁴⁸ Myers, 203.

¹⁴⁹ Fynes Moryson, "The Manners and Customs of Ireland" in *Illustrations of Irish history and topography, mainly of the seventeenth century*, ed. C. Litton Falkiner (London: Longmans, Green, 1904), 312.

¹⁵⁰ Falkiner, 312.

vulgarly called bards, who in their songs extol the most bloody, licentious men, and no others, and to allure the hearers, not to the love of religion and civil manners, but to outrages, robberies, living as outlaws, and contempt of the magistrates' and the King's laws."¹⁵¹ His complaint that the 'pestilential rhymers' stir rebellion and unrest among the native population is hardly original. It would appear that the English are capable of appreciating the aesthetic qualities of bardic compositions, but object to the politicized nature of the institution. Moryson supports this theory criticizing the rhymers' choice of topic as well as the credulity of the general public. He argues that the rhymers' power over the Irish stems from their ignorance of true honor. Their dedication to mere vainglory in place of true honor leaves them in greater fear of a satire than of the Lord Deputy. The bards wouldn't have such power if the listeners were more discerning.

At the same time that he argues for their ignorance, Moryson admits to a certain cunning among the Irish. "For the wits of the Irish, they themselves brag that Ireland yields not a natural fool, which brag I have heard divers men confirm, never any to contradict. My honoured Lord the late Earl of Devonshire till his dying day kept an Irishman in fool's apparel, and commonly called his lordship's fool; but we found him to have craft of humouring every man to attain his own ends, and to have nothing of a natural fool."¹⁵² This contradiction is curious, but seems to have reflected a fairly common belief amongst sixteenth-century Englishmen. His use of the word cunning is particularly telling because it tends to point to a more natural sort of intelligence. For example, a fox could be considered cunning. The word also had more implicit negative connotations, implying the use of intellect and skill to deceive.¹⁵³ In the same way that

¹⁵¹ Moryson in Myers, 202.

¹⁵² Falkiner, 315.

¹⁵³ cunning, n.1

Second edition, 1989; online version March 2011. <<http://www.oed.com:80/Entry/45864>>; accessed 02 May 2011. Earlier version first published in *New English Dictionary*, 1893.

bards singing folk music are less civilized than poets reciting odes, a cunning Irishman is less civilized than a university-trained scholar.

Moryson's physical descriptions are fairly standard and relatively accurate depictions of life among the lower class Irish. It is his descriptions of Irish character that are really fascinating, illustrating what was by that point a fully-formed stereotype of ignorance, cunning and stubbornness. This last trait appears to have offended him greatly, and he complains that "the English as naturally inclined to apply themselves to the manners and customs of any foreign nations with whom they live and converse, whereas the mere Irish by nature have singular and obstinate pertinacity in retaining their old manners and customs."¹⁵⁴

This last point of Moryson's was a common complaint among the English. The tenacity with which the Irish clung to their native culture, language and traditions baffled and frustrated the English. This frustration informed their depiction of the Irish, as amazement that Anglicization was not being embraced developed into a certainty of Irish backwardness and barbarity—for what forward thinking civilized people would refuse the gift of English culture? The stubbornness of the Irish, as well as their sloth, violence, and other barbaric traits, became embedded in the English consciousness over the course of the sixteenth century. In the Irish the English saw a dark reflection of themselves—their own culture entirely inverted. Poetry was perverted to encourage cruel and barbaric behavior, the language, manner of dress, religion, and even food differed widely from that of England, and, worst of all, the Irish had no desire to change.

¹⁵⁴ Falkiner, 310.

Chapter 4: The Law

The writings of these five different men reveal that one of the great fears motivating the English in their efforts to destroy bardic culture was that the poetry of the *filid* was inciting rebellion and violence among the native Irish. It is this concern that appears in nearly every English account, and this complaint which resurfaces constantly in correspondence and legal documents as justification for increasingly stringent laws addressing the *filid*. When Smythe, Derricke, Spenser, Dawtrey and Moryson addressed this fear, they were representing the thoughts and fears that had plagued the English for years. Walter Cowley, Principal Solicitor for Ireland from 1537-1546, wrote to Lord Chancellor Cromwell in his first year of office that, “Harpers, rymours, Irishe cronyclers, bardes and isshallyn commonly goo with praisses to gentilmen in the Englishe Pale, praying in rymes, otherwise called danes, their extorcioners, robories, and abuses, as valiauntnes, which rejoysth them in that their evell doings; and procure a talent of Irishe disposicion and conversacion in theme, which is likewise convenient to bee expellid.”¹⁵⁵ Cowley feared the effect that the rymers were having on the Irishry in general, and wished to get rid of them in some form or fashion. When Gerald Fitzgerald treated with Elizabeth I in 1564 regarding continued violence between his own family and their archrivals, the Butlers of Ormond, he was forced to agree to multiple clauses limiting and attacking Irish institutions on his lands, including rhymers and bards, who, “by their ditties and rhymes, made for divers lords and gentlemen in Ireland, in commendation and high praise of extortion, rebellion, rape, rapine, and other injustice, encourage those lords rather to follow those vices than to abandon them.”¹⁵⁶ The Earl and the lords and gentlemen under him were admonished not to

¹⁵⁵ ‘The Irish Language in the Early Modern Period’ in Moody, T.W., F.X. Martin and F.J. Byrnes, eds. *A New History of Ireland*, vol. III, ‘Early Modern Ireland, 1534-1691’, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 520.

¹⁵⁶ *Calendar of Patent and Close Rolls, Ireland, Henry VIII-Elizabeth, I* (Dublin, 1861), 485-487.

reward ‘such lewd rhymes,’ or they would be fined twice the amount they paid for the poem, while the guilty poet would be fined “according to the discretion of the Commission.”

Considering the high rank and near immune status of these poets within Gaelic society, such limitations seem a reasonable precaution on the part of the English. Richard Stanihurst, a contributor to *Holinshed’s Chronicles*, published in 1580, remarked that “they esteeme their poets...whereof the lords and gentlemen stand in great awe.”¹⁵⁷ Stanihurst was a closet Catholic who eventually fled to the continent to become a Jesuit. Although their common religion made him somewhat sympathetic to the Irish, it did not affect his observations, and he was not the only foreigner to comment on the esteem with which the *filid* were treated. The English were well aware of the amount of clout and influence that the *filid* had in Irish society, and it made them nervous. The *filid* were a highly influential group, and the amount of anti-English propaganda that they were disseminating persuaded the English to consider methods of limiting their ability to incite rebellion.

The concern that the bards were fomenting rebellion was most frequently cited and discussed, but it was not the only reason that the English were wary of the *filid*. The bards were an integral part of the infrastructure of Gaelic culture. They were the keepers of a collective memory, the record of hundreds of years of history and oral cultures and tradition. In addition to this, the *fili* served as supports for the social and political structure of Gaelic society, something that the English were trying to subdue and exterminate in favor of their own manners and customs. Irish poets were the arbiters of honor and prestige amongst the Gaels, and in performing their duties and eulogizing the Irish lords they legitimized those same lords as well as the underlying society that they represented. This was not only a case of deliberate rebellion and

¹⁵⁷ Richard Stanihurst, *Holinshed’s Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland in Six Volumes: Volume VI: Ireland*, (London, 1808), 67.

active resistance to acculturation. Although many poets did resist attempts at Anglicization, from the English perspective it was their very existence that strengthened the indigenous culture and threatened the invading Englishmen. The hereditary nature of the craft echoed the strong family bonds that underlay all aspects of Irish culture. The use of Classical Irish as the language of poetry ensured its continuance, while the classical allusions and constant inclusion of mythic characters and events kept the Irish close to their roots. For example, Tadhg Dall O’hUiginn’s poem to Hugh O’Donnell, written in the mid to late sixteenth century, is rife with mentions of Ireland’s ancient past: “It was in this fashion, O thick-haired one, that *Maol Miosgothach* obtained of yore from the race of famous Niall that extraordinary award of goods...Donnell grandson of Niall, then asked the poet for a story; the best of all storytellers was he, narrator of Ireland’s lore.”¹⁵⁸ These constant references to Irish mythology—and the relation between bards and kings—made it difficult for the interlopers to weaken the ties between the Irish and their cultural history. While the English generally don’t articulate this, the support of traditional Gaelic culture provided by the *filid* and their work proved highly detrimental to English plans for reform and Anglicization.

The Anglo-Irish were an accepted part of Irish culture by the sixteenth century—they spoke the language, married into ancient Gaelic families, and upheld Gaelic cultures and traditions to a large extent. This included the patronizing of bardic poets—the *filid* worked for both Gaelic and Anglo-Norman families without distinction, frequently lending legitimacy to the rule of the non-Irish.¹⁵⁹ For example, a panegyric composed to honor MacWilliam Burke of Co. Mayo sometime in the 1570s directly addresses the legitimacy of his claim by claiming that Ireland has always gone to the strongest, and listing the invasions of the past. “The land of

¹⁵⁸ O’hUiginn, “To Hugh O’Donnell,” cited in Knott, 15.

¹⁵⁹ Lennon, 64.

Banbha is but swordland: let all be defied to show that there is any inheritance to the Land of *Fál* save that of conquest by force of battle!...The law of this territory is that it shall be subjugate to him who is strongest...Should any say that the Burkes of lion-like prowess are strangers—let one of the blood of Gael or Gall¹⁶⁰ be found who is not a sojourner amongst us.”¹⁶¹ According to bardic conventions, the lord to whom the poem is addressed is worked into the mythic heritage of Ireland and the Irish, regardless of the fact that he is not a Gael himself. From this poem it is easy to see how the bardic works contributed to the alliance of the Old English with the Irish, uniting the two groups against the New English in an increasingly polarized cultural climate.¹⁶²

Not all of the Anglo-Norman dynasties allied themselves with the Irish. Different clans responded in different ways. For example, the Butlers chose to conform to the new English regime and defend its interests from within the system, while the Catholic Fitzgeralds became increasingly alienated from the English monarchy, symbolizing this defiance by assuming the trappings of Gaelic culture.¹⁶³ It is likely this symbolism that the Privy Council had in mind when they created the conditions of John Desmond’s return to Ireland in 1573, forbidding him from maintaining, or even sheltering a rhymer or bard.¹⁶⁴ They may also have feared that rhymers would have encouraged further action and violence among already rebellious subjects. It was because of families like the Fitzgeralds, old English families that openly espoused Irish manners and customs, that Sir Henry Sidney suggested the resurrection of the Statutes of Kilkenny in 1588, advising that they “be put into execution against Irish manners and habit...

¹⁶⁰ From the Irish for foreigner—used to refer to any who were not native Irish.

¹⁶¹ O’hUiginn, 80-81.

¹⁶² Crowley, *War of Words* 55.

¹⁶³ Bradshaw, 42.

¹⁶⁴ Calendar of the State Papers relating to Ireland, of the reigns of Henry VIII., Edward VI., Mary, and Elizabeth, 1509-[1603]. Ed. Hans Claude Hamilton. Vol. 1: 1509-1573 London: Longman, Green, Longman, & Roberts, 1860, *State Papers Online*, Gale, Cengage Learning, 2011 <
http://go.galegroup.com/mss/i.do?id=GALE|MC4309505010&v=2.1&u=viva_wm&it=r&p=SPOL&sw=w&viewtype=Calendar >

considering...how those of the English race...are grown to such barbarous, disordered manner and trade of life.”¹⁶⁵

At the same time that Sidney and the Council decreed a resumption of the Statutes, they commented on “the want of execution of such laws as from age to age have been set down by Parliament, restraining all those of the English race from the using and trading any of these ‘forecited’ Irish disorders and customs.”¹⁶⁶ They recognized that despite the various laws that had been made over the last century in an effort to prevent indigenization of the English and to weaken Irish culture, the English government in Ireland had been incredibly lax in enforcing them, with the result that the laws were ineffective due to lack of enforcement. This is evidence both of the large disconnect between the government in England and its representatives abroad, and of the nebulous nature of Tudor law itself. Although it is possible trace the laws as they were written, thus tracking the official concerns about bards and harpers, it is more difficult to determine to what degree they were upheld locally, where personal politics held sway.

Laws and other such directives addressing the bardic order appeared with increasing frequency in the latter half of the century. While they may vary regarding jurisdiction and occasionally the severity of the penalty, they all follow the same basic pattern. Bards and rhymers are included in a list of other types of people that are considered idle, unproductive and generally harmful to the commonwealth. These typically included *cearrbhaigh* (carrows), *isshallyn*,¹⁶⁷ bards/harpers of course, vagabonds, and all other ‘loose or idle people.’ Altogether, these fall under the category of ‘masterless men,’ a demographic that frustrated the English to no end by interfering with the desired transition to English common law. Repeated attempts to

¹⁶⁵ *Calendar of the Patent and Close Rolls of Chancery in Ireland, Henry VIII to 18th Elizabeth, 1536*, in *The Politics of Language in Ireland, 1366-1922: A Sourcebook*, ed. By Tony Crowley, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 41.

¹⁶⁶ Crowley, 41.

¹⁶⁷ From the Irish *aos ealaian*, or ‘people of the arts’—minstrels.

advance shiring policy in Ireland were foiled by these wanderers, who belonged to no single place, and therefore could not be taxed as residents of that place.¹⁶⁸ This was yet another motive behind the criminalization of the bardic poets, a process that began approximately midway through the century and continued, intensifying and escalating as time went on.

Beginning at about 1570, there was a veritable flood of legislation against them. It is likely that Elizabeth's excommunication this same year, and the resulting increase of religious and political tensions at home and abroad, were at least partially responsible for the rapid increase. Gerald, Earl of Kildare, was commissioned in 1571 to "punish by death or otherwise, as directed, harpers, rhymers, bards, idlemen, vagabonds, and such horseboys as have not their master's bill to show whose men they are."¹⁶⁹ Also in 1571, Sir John Perrot, then President of Munster decreed that "All carroughes, bards, rhymers and common idle men and women within this province making rhymes, bringing of messages, and common players of cards, to be spoiled of all their goods and chattels, and to be put in the next stocks, there to remain till they shall find sufficient surety to leave that wicked 'thrade' of life and to fall to other occupation."¹⁷⁰ Sir Henry Harrington was sent to serve as sheriff of Wicklow in 1578, provided that he followed the instructions issued to him by the Privy Council. These instructions included issuing a proclamation to the effect that "no idele person, vagabonde or masterlesse man, barde, rymoure, or any other notorious or detected malefactor do haunte, remaine, or abyde within the limites and bondes of your auethoritie, but that he depart within viii days next after the proclamacion made, upon peine of whipping or other such sharppe correction as you shall in good discreacion

¹⁶⁸ Padraig A. Breatnach, "An Appeal for a Guarantor", *Celtica* 21 (Essays in honour of Brian Ó Cuív) (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1990), 28.

¹⁶⁹ Faints of Elizabeth, no. 1845.

¹⁷⁰ C. Maxwell, *Irish History from contemporary sources 1509-1610*, (London 1923), 166.

appoint.”¹⁷¹ This penalty seems much more lenient than those mentioned in the earlier decrees, but it continues on to authorize martial law against those aforementioned people who are still present after twenty days have passed. This more violent and aggressive trend continued in 1579, when the Council responded to the Desmond rebellion by sentencing “all leaders of blind folks, harpers, bards, rhymers, and all loose and idle people having no master to be executed by martial law.”¹⁷² The Article of Plantation in Munster stated that inhabitants were forbidden to “receive into their habitations, retain, or lodge, any Irish rhymers, bards, harpers, or such idle persons,”¹⁷³ and by 1602 the President and Council of Munster decreed that the marshall of the province was “straightely charged and commanded to execute by marshall lawe all manner Bards, Rymers, Harpers, Stokeghes, Clubbures, and all manner of vagrant and maisterless persons which he or any other thereto authorized shall fynde traveiling or residing within this province or any part thereof, in the end of ten daies nexte after publishing of this present proclamation without the lycense or passport of the martiall.”¹⁷⁴ Although the English government had consistently passed legislation against the *filid* since the Norman invasion, such laws increased exponentially in frequency and severity towards the end of the sixteenth century. In every instance, the English hoped to force out the entire bardic order, first simply out of areas under English control, but eventually out of existence. This consistency of purpose is telling in and of itself, considering the nebulous nature of Tudor government, both at home and abroad.

Despite the increasingly stern tone of English legislation, it does not necessarily follow that the laws were enforced with equal stringency. The actions of the various Lord Deputies did not always match their words, as can be seen from Perrot’s confusing and convoluted

¹⁷¹ Report on the Manuscript of Lord de l’Isle and Dudley preserved at Penshurst Place, Vol. 2, (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1934), 82.

¹⁷² Calendar of State Papers Relating to Ireland (1574-1485), p.179.

¹⁷³ Calendar of State Papers Relating to Ireland (1586-1588), 313.

¹⁷⁴ T. Dineley, *Observations in a voyage through the kingdom of Ireland* (1681) (Dublin 1870) 84 n.1.

relationship with the Irish harpers. While president he passed laws against them, but then after his term as viceroy he defended three individual harpers, and was in fact accused of being too lenient towards them at his trial for treason.¹⁷⁵ Even more confusing, he stated during his trial that he paid a harper to create a poem honoring Elizabeth.¹⁷⁶ Nor was he the only Englishman to patronize the bards: Sir George Carew, President of Munster, and Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy, Lord Deputy of Ireland, both hired Aonghus na n-aor O'Daly to write satires of prominent Irish families at the turn of the century.¹⁷⁷ It is clear that there was a disconnect between what the viceroys were legislating and how strictly they were actually upholding the laws that they passed. As was previously discussed, a huge amount of political maneuvering was required of the lord deputies in the course of their work. The large amount of compromising and bargaining required in their attempts to anglicize the Irish meant that anti-harper legislation and similar laws targeting Gaelic life were not always strictly enforced. For example, a Lord Deputy uncertain in his ability to maintain order might look the other way if an Irish ally retained certain Gaelic customs. There were over fifty individuals described as 'rimers' in the Fiantes between 1570 and 1603, all of whom were pardoned for some reason. It is likely that many others named in the Fiantes were also rimers or bards, but chose not to identify themselves as such while trying to obtain a pardon.¹⁷⁸

This does not mean that the *fili* were not being targeted by the English government. Because so many of the relevant documents are now lost, it is nearly impossible to determine exactly how thoroughly the anti-harper laws were carried out and different points in history and at whose command, but it is clear that by the latter half of the century they were an

¹⁷⁵ Flood, 123.

¹⁷⁶ Julia M. Walker, *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Interpretations of Gloriana*, (United States: Duke University Press, 1998), 62.

¹⁷⁷ Donald Jackson, "The Irish Language and Tudor Government", *Eire-Ireland*, v.8, (1973), 28.

¹⁷⁸ O'Rahilly, 87.

acknowledged difficulty for the Irish poets they targeted, disrupting their movements and preventing them from playing the role of substantiating power—or inciting rebellion—which they had played earlier in the century. Regardless of whether or not they were prosecuted, the government’s anti-harper campaign weakened the bardic institution, slowly bleeding them dry of resources over the course of the century.

Chapter 5: From the Irish perspective

As the English attack on the *fili* intensified over the course of the century, its targets reacted through the medium they knew best—poetry. It is through this poetry that it is possible to trace their reactions today. The most basic reaction is simple awareness—the *filid* understood that they were being targeted. One sixteenth century poem reads, “And it befell—most harmfully—that the foreign rulers of *Mac Con*’s Munster arrested the poet of Ulster when he was perfected in his art.”¹⁷⁹ Cu Chonnacht ó Dálaigh wrote a poem in 1597 describing his reluctance to leave Aodh Ruadh¹⁸⁰ and return home to Munster, for fear that the English would capture him: “Were I to go to my own country—if I am destined to reach it—I would be accused of many reckless offences. I am reluctant to face my crimes among the English; my mind grows confused in the midst of them... If I were among them I well believe they would accuse me of more offences; all the more is it better not to go near them.”¹⁸¹ He is convinced that should he but enter English territory, he will be arrested and charged with some sort of crime, simply because of his profession. O’Dálaigh goes on to list the ‘crimes’ of which the English would hold him guilty: “They would say, if it is the case that I belong to those practitioners of my art who excite bitterness in Irishmen and enmity against Saxon nobles: ‘They extol the nobility of their forebears to the descendants of Mil. They declare to them that Ireland is their due inheritance—words that ought not to be believed. When the descendants of Gaoidheal Glas hear mention of their ancestral kings from the certifiers of learning it fills their minds with pride. Also—it is but a small part of their malice—in order to cause dissension between the English and the Irish, the

¹⁷⁹ Tadhg Dall O’hUiggin, 14. (Although the date that this poem was composed remains uncertain, it is addressed to Hugh O’Donnell, who was elected chief in 1567 and died in 1600)

¹⁸⁰ Red Hugh O Donnell, one of the leaders in the 9 Years War against the English

¹⁸¹ “Cu Chonnacht O Dálaigh’s poem before leaving Aodh Ruadh” in *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in honor of James Carney*, eds. Donnchadh ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach, and Kim McCone, (Ireland: An Sagart, 1989), 38.

poets of Ior's resplendent land foretell evil and turmoil. You yourself like all of them are pleased to praise their crimes. If it should harm you it is fitting; inciting evil doings is part of your nature.'"¹⁸² The *fili*'s conviction that he will be arrested and accused of these crimes based solely on his profession is evidence that the anti-harper laws were a tangible presence within Ireland, regardless of how strictly they were being enforced.

Ó Dálaigh's poem was written at the tail end of the sixteenth century, when the anti-harper legislation was at its strongest (that is, the strongest it had been at that point in history). By analyzing the poetry written prior to and during that period, it is possible to trace the reactions and attitudes of the *filid* towards the English. In this way it is possible to create a dialogue between the English and the Irish, with the bardic poetry serving as a counterpoint to the numerous English records available on the topic.

Tadhg Dall O'hUiggin's *To Turlogh Luineach* was written sometime around Luineach's accession to the title of O'Neill, shortly after Shane O'Neill's death in 1567. In this poem he glorifies the O'Neill family, particularly his patron Turlogh Luineach, reciting his genealogy and declaiming the glories of his reign. It is clear that Turlogh has been in power for several years at least, for he is praised for the peace that he has created within Ulster—a feat which could not have happened overnight. "A king through whom the men of Ulster are without war, without conflict; without envy, without resentment, without anger, without destruction of castles, without reaving...Even on the highway a ring of ruddy gold might be safely left for a year, such is the rigor of the law amongst men of Ulster."¹⁸³ O'hUiggin is praising Turlogh regarding the stability and just nature of his regime, proclaiming the safety and peace that he has brought to Ulster. This small portion of Ireland is painted as a refuge from the English, a safe place created by Turlogh

¹⁸² "Cu Chonnacht O Dálaigh's poem before leaving Aodh Ruadh", 39.

¹⁸³ Tadhg Dall O'hUiggin, 30.

in which to withstand the foreign attack. “The foreigners are the deluge, the Plain of *Conchobhar*¹⁸⁴ is the ark, and the Noah of that land is Turlogh, noble, hospitable scion of Tara’s fold.” O’hUiggin’s portrayal of the English is decidedly negative, but he seems to be suggesting a withdrawal from them rather than an outright rebellion against the foreigners. His biblical allusion suggests a conception of the English as a passing trouble, something that must be weathered until their eventual defeat. The value placed on the peace within Ulster suggests that at this point, O’hUiggin deems discretion the better part of valor, and suggests that if Irish culture and the Irish people can find refuge from the English, eventually the threat will dissipate.

This same O’hUiggin composed a poem to Brian Na Murrtha about a decade later (between 1580 and 1583), which espouses a somewhat different idea. The experiences of the intervening decade and the transformations in English policy have persuaded him that the invaders must be dealt with immediately rather than treated with. This new viewpoint informs the political advice that appears in Brian Na Murrtha’s panegyric. Although the valuation of peace found in the previous poem is still present, O’hUiggin maintains that “None save the fighting man finds peace...the Gaels of civil behavior will not get peace from the foreigners.”¹⁸⁵ This is a deliberate and unmistakable call to arms against the English, as well as a condemnation against those Irish who have chosen to cooperate with the English. O’hUiggin shows no reticence or concern about making such volatile statements—in fact, he feels that it is his duty as a poet to share these opinions. “Great unfriendliness were it did none of the poets of the bright-knolled land say to the men of *Fódla*¹⁸⁶ that they should declare war upon the foreigners.”¹⁸⁷ This reference to the *fili*’s traditional role of advisor shows that although the English attempted

¹⁸⁴ Ulster

¹⁸⁵ Tadhg Dall O’hUiggin, 72.

¹⁸⁶ Another name for Ireland.

¹⁸⁷ Tadhg Dall O’hUiggin, 73.

to diminish the role of the *filid* in Irish society, they were having limited success at best. In fact, it is possible that their actions against the *filid* were part of the reason that the poets urged for war so intensely, in an attempt to rid themselves of the English threat. “Then will the Saxon tribe be vanquished by the seed of keen-weaponed *Gaedheal*,¹⁸⁸ so that from the proclamation of war there will never be any save Irishmen over the land of *Fódla*.”¹⁸⁹ In the eyes of O’hUiggin, violent conflict is required to save Gaelic culture.

Having pressed for battle against the English, O’hUiggin continues, describing the likely actions of the English in response, and warning his lord Brian against their craftiness and guile. He paints the English as untrustworthy, likely to use guile and false words in an attempt to disarm their adversary before treacherously bringing him down. O’hUiggin predicts that the English will seek a peace treaty when faced with a strong fight, and then proceed to break that treaty without remorse. “They will ask the leader of peace of bright Ushnagh’s meadow to come with them to court, and they will not yet seek requital for what the seed of *Fearchna* will have done on that raid. Let them not with honeyed words beguile Brian so of Brian from Breffney; woe to him who would approach them, ravenous, destructive barbarians.”¹⁹⁰ This depiction of the English is fascinating, particularly because it bears such similarity to the English descriptions of the Irish. The poet is painting his enemies (for they are without a doubt perceived as enemies) in the least flattering way possible, hammering home repeatedly the point that they are not to be trusted. He reiterates this theme again later on in the poem: “Let Brian, son of Brian, son of Owen, understand that none of bright *Banbha*’s¹⁹¹ warriors come from the foreigners save from

¹⁸⁸ The native Irish.

¹⁸⁹ Tadhg Dall O’hUiggin, 78.

¹⁹⁰ Tadhg Dall O’hUiggin, 75.

¹⁹¹ The patron goddess of Ireland, often used to personify the country in poetry and song.

treachery or betrayal.”¹⁹² This last caution could be read as a warning not only against the English themselves, but against any Irish who would ally themselves with the foreigners in any way. Such a reading mirrors the English concerns about indigenization, suggesting a fear of English treachery spreading to the Irish people. This resistance to Anglicization is echoed and expanded upon in Laoisich Mac an Bhairst’s poem, *The Courtier and the Rebel*.

Laoisioch Mac an Bhairst also wrote at the end of the century, peaking at around 1600.¹⁹³ *The Courtier and Rebel* was written in reproach of a Gaelic noble of the Elizabethan era who has taken to following English fashions and customs.¹⁹⁴ The first line typifies the entire poem, “O man who follows English ways, who cut your thick-clustering hair, graceful hand of my choice, you are not Donnchadh’s good son! If you were, you would not give up your hair for an artificial English mode.”¹⁹⁵ Firstly, it is clear that the anglicizing policies of the English have had at least some small effect, much to the dismay of the *filid*. This example intimates that the *filid* were one of the primary forces against Anglicization in Ireland, making them figures of great importance regarding Irish-English interactions from the sixteenth century to the modern era. The *fili* in question makes it clear that the noble’s decision to espouse English customs means that he is a bad son to Donnchadh—that he is in essence a bad Irishman. This shows us that there is some sort of criteria which defines the Irishman in their own minds—that there is indeed a perception of “Irishness” in the minds of the Gaels and that this perception is diametrically opposed to the New English.

True to bardic form, this relatively new idea is set within a traditional and accepted framework. The backsliding Gael is compared with his brother, who is described as the ideal

¹⁹² Tadhg O’uiggin, 76.

¹⁹³ Brian Cleeve & Ann Brady, *A Dictionary of Irish Writers* (Dublin: Lilliput 1985) <http://www.pgil-eirdata.org/html/pgil_datasets/authors/Mac/MacAnBhairst%28family%29/life.htm>

¹⁹⁴ Caball, *Poets and Politics*, 71.

¹⁹⁵ Bergin, 231.

Irishman. “A man who never loved English ways is Eóghan Bán, beloved of noble ladies.”¹⁹⁶

Here Eoghan is being described with the same language and in the same manner as a patron would be in a praise poem—his virility and physical appearance are celebrated, as are his martial tendencies: “A troop of horses at the brink of a gap, a fierce fight, a struggle with foot-soldiers, these are some of the desires of Donnchadh’s son—and seeking battle against the foreigners!”¹⁹⁷ This line towards the end of the poem encourages violent resistance against the New English, but that is not the only purpose of them poem. The author goes to great lengths to chastise and shame the man who has abandoned his native culture in favor of the fashions and customs of the English. This poem is an ideal example of the influence of the *filid* on Irish resistance to Anglicization.

From these poems one gets a clearer idea of the anti-English sentiment that the *filid* were supporting, not only with their continued support of traditional Gaelic customs, but with blunt and direct resistance to Anglicization. Additionally, from their traditional role as political advisors they strongly urged military resistance to the English. This resistance gained strength as the English became more aware of the *filid*’s influence and intensified their efforts to eradicate them. What followed was a cycle of escalating conflict in which each side amplified their response to what they saw as an increasing threat. In a very real sense, the *filid* were a major influence behind the paradigm shift that eventually resulted in the intense anti-cultural laws enacted by the English through the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Prior the mid sixteenth century, laws regarding Gaelic culture were directed only at English subjects, in an attempt to halt rampant indigenization. The anti-harper rhetoric of the Tudor era pointed Anglo-

¹⁹⁶ Bergin, 232.

¹⁹⁷ Bergin, 232.

Irish relations in a new direction, targeting aspects of Irish culture directly and enforcing these acts with martial law.

Conclusion

Relations between Ireland and England have been tense and volatile since the first Norman invasion in the twelfth century. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, English actions in Ireland had reached new heights of violence and intolerance. This was the result of a trajectory that began in the Tudor era, escalating as a result of increased tensions between the English government and the native Irish and Old English, encouraged by the *filid*. The sixteenth century was the beginning of the end in terms of English policy and Irish culture—it was at this point that the laws became more stringent and the military became more involved in the re-conquest of Ireland. The *filid* of Ireland, known to English literature as harpers, rhymers and bards, played a significant role in the continued resistance to Anglicization, as well as encouraging a military response to English encroachment. The English, recognizing their influence and frustrated at the Irish people's stubborn resistance to attempts at Anglicization, passed a series of laws targeting the *filid*, resulting in an escalating war between traditional Irish culture and the reform-minded New English.

This exacerbation of the pre-existing tensions between the New English and the Irish changed the structure of Anglo-Irish relations for the next several hundred years. The actions of the *filid* led the English to target Irish culture in a way that they had not previously. Whereas before they had concentrated on merely preventing indigenization of the English, counting on gradual reform to Anglicize the native population, after the sixteenth century the English government resorted to direct attacks on the trappings of Irish culture among the native population, banning their native dress, language, and customs. The downfall of the *filid* was not an unfortunate side effect of the Flight of the Earls, but the result of a deliberate attack by the English. This attack was part of the changing approach to re-conquest in Ireland that typified the

Tudor era, and the continuing violence and tumult a consequence of the hardening of Irish resistance promoted by the *filid*.

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